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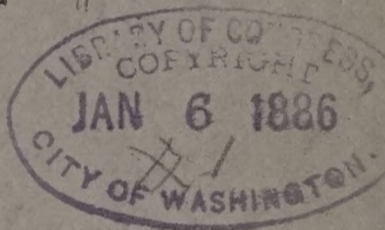
CABIN AND GONDOLA

BY

CHARLOTTE DUNNING

AUTHOR OF "UPON A CAST" ETC.

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NEW YORK
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1886

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NOTE.—*These stories, with the exception of the one entitled “Pam,” which now is published for the first time, appeared originally in “Lippincott’s Magazine,” “The Atlantic Monthly,” and “The Parisian,” a weekly journal, published in English, at Paris.*

CABIN AND GONDOLA.

P A M.

PART I.

ALTHOUGH the sun had begun to take the chill out of the early morning air, Mammy Sue and her black-and-tan tribe still huddled close to a fire that had been kindled in the open space before the palace door. Over the flames hung a great iron pot, full of a steaming something which sent up a greasy smell to mingle with the sweetness of the yellow jasmine, and the smoke curled away through the long-leaved banana plants, through the glowing orange-trees, and was finally lost in the palmettos on the river bank. Five or six lean dogs basked in the warmth of the crackling fire along with the pickaninnies; two or three black hogs waddled near, and turkeys and chickens scratched the sand on the edge of the family circle. As the sun rose higher the fire sank lower, and the circle was finally broken by a pickaninny who crept away to follow an adventurous chicken up the palace steps. The door stood open so temptingly that the chicken stepped gingerly over the threshold, but flew back in the pickaninny's very face when an old shoe was hurled at it by some one within the palace. The lord of the manor was out

of bed. He could be heard talking to his henchman, and presently he appeared in the door-way, dressed in what had once been an English shooting suit. As he looked abroad, he absently brushed his thin gray hair from a part that trickled along the middle of his head and meandered down to the nape of his neck. He was tall and gaunt. Over his breast floated a fine, luxuriant beard of various gray and faded yellow shades, and up about his red nose curled a straw-colored mustache. That nose had a right royal arch, but the little negro on the palace steps grinned as he gazed in King's kindly, watery eyes, and when King threw down the brush, the little fellow tried to smooth his own woolly hair, and he was laughed at, not rebuked, by his majesty.

"Where is it?" said King, half to himself, as he searched for something or other, and—"Under the table," answered his henchman, who seemed to know instinctively what that something was. It was a demijohn, and King was pouring the contents into a dirty tumbler when the henchman came out of the inner room, fastening the strap that held up a pair of weather-beaten trousers.

"Now go slow, King," he said, persuasively. "There ain't much left."

Over the top of the dirty tumbler King looked reproachfully at his henchman.

"Was I ever a hog, Johnnie?" he asked.

Johnnie shook the demijohn, and the anxious frown on his face was replaced by a smile. It was a handsome face, burned by the rays of the sun, but not dyed by draughts from the demijohn as his majesty's was. A short, curling beard covered chin

and jaws; a mustache, a trifle lighter in hue, shaded the upper lip; hair lighter yet, almost a golden brown, grew thick on the well-shaped head; and from under a broad brow laughed eyes as blue as the Florida sky.

King and henchman ate the breakfast set before them by Mammy Sue, and meanwhile gave sundry orders to the black boy Sam, chaffed Lena, the slim yellow girl, cuffed the dogs and pickaninnies when they pressed too near, and then they lit their pipes and sauntered towards the village, Johnnie swinging the empty demijohn. A store, a blacksmith shop, a gin-mill, a score of unpainted pine shanties, and that was Lime Landing, the one place for twenty miles around where flour and whiskey and calico could be bought. In the straggling, sandy street long-nosed hogs disputed the right of way with idle negroes and shiftless "crackers." These hogs, together with some pinched, stunted Florida cattle made up the wealth of the community. Oranges were raised, too, but not many, and the palace grove was the only one successful enough to bear a mortgage. It got its name from its owner's drunken boasts, for after King had celebrated a cock-fight in due form, he was sure to talk about his fine home in England, about his days at Oxford, and about his sister who had married Lord Somebody or other. And his henchman, too, perhaps told the truth when he was in liquor; but he was rarely so drunk as to talk much of his past career, yet he had sworn that he was the son of a parson in New England, and had spent four merry years at Harvard. The keeper of the tavern, the keeper of the store, the keeper of the

gin-mill and faro-bank, all the Florida crackers, all the negroes seemed to recognize in King and Johnnie men of superior rank; but this profound respect was not accompanied by a feeling of perfect confidence when it came to a matter of money. The few northern sportsmen who visited Lime Landing in the winter for the sake of quail or snipe shooting were inclined to treat King and Johnnie fraternally until they had accepted an invitation to a palace cock-fight, and after that they were apt to button up their pockets and shake their heads when the home of royalty was mentioned. And these sportsmen did not often come twice or stay long, for the food and beds at Lime Landing bore a not altogether good reputation in Florida. The tavern, a long, low, dilapidated pine structure, stood at the head of a rotten pier where four times each week a little stern-wheel steamer halted. The *Seminola* was due at daybreak, but she was so rarely on time that her coming was generally awaited by the late risers of Lime Landing as well as by those who, having gone to bed at dusk, had arisen with the sun. They were all there when King and Johnnie and the demijohn appeared, and black and white and yellow exchanged greetings while waiting for the tardy boat from Enterprise.

The *Seminola* at last glided around a bend in the river, and bumped up against the rotten pier, filling the air with the nameless smell that exhales from stale food, bilge-water, and rum-soaked animals. Johnnie made sundry humorous remarks upon the odor, and King bluntly gave his opinions concerning it, all in a good-natured way; but the captain of the vessel was not in a frame of mind to appre-

ciate either their wit or their frankness. He was a young man with fiery face and sodden eyes, and he turned on them with oaths as foul as his boat. "Who are you, givin' yerselves sich airs," he asked. "You, Tom King, and you, Johnnie Gordon? There ain't a man in Floridy 'd trust you with a two-dollar bill. Ef you don't like things here, why don't you go where you like 'em better, eh?"

He paused for a reply, but King simply took his pipe from his mouth, while Johnnie shut his left eye and scratched the tip of his right ear.

"I'll tell yer," shouted the captain. "'Cause if yer went where you belong, you'd be jailed up, and 'cause yer like niggers better than—" He did not finish his sentence, for King stretched out his long arm, took the man by the collar, and dropped him into the brown water of the St. John. There was a roar of laughter among the idlers on the pier as the captain, dripping and swearing, climbed back into his boat.

"Takes the King," said a tallow-faced cracker. "An honor'ble gen'leman won't stand no sich talk as that."

The honorable gentleman went towards the tavern with his henchman, pausing to speak to two New York sportsmen whose clean shooting clothes did not hint at tremendous slaughter of birds.

"Why ain't you after quail to-day, doctor?" King asked one of them.

"Out of cartridges," the doctor answered. "And, any way, we are going to leave to-morrow. I can't stand the hotel. It is the vilest rookery I ever came across."

“The *Seminola* is worse,” said his companion.

“ ‘And in the lowest deep, a lower deep,
Still threat’ning to devour me, opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven,’ ”

quoted Johnnie.

The man who thought the *Seminola* worse than the tavern stared in surprise, for he recognized the hackneyed lines, and he had not been prepared for a quotation from Milton.

“Who are they?” he asked, after King and Johnnie had gone into the tavern.

“Vagabonds,” his friend answered. “King is an Englishman; Johnnie is a Yankee who lives on King, and both stay here for reasons of their own. I suspect that the reasons are good; I have heard that Johnnie wrote a name once or twice that wasn’t his own.”

“They are men of education, I take it,” said the other.

“Oh yes; and men of good family, if their own stories can be believed. They are such liars, though! Why, the tavern-keeper won’t fill that demijohn until he sees his money.”

The tavern-keeper saw his money evidently, for when King and Johnnie sauntered homeward they were both in the condition of the demijohn which King carried carefully. At the post-office he received a letter, and he slipped it into his pocket, saying,

“It’s from my sister.”

“From your sister her Grace, or your sister her Ladyship?” asked Johnnie, his eyes twinkling.

“From my sister Pam—Pamela, you know. But one of my sisters did marry an earl, whether you be-

lieve it or not. Pam ain't more'n two-and-twenty; she's the youngest. Lemme see. First there was Alec, and then Bob, and then me, and then Edith, and—"

"Oh, skip 'em," cried Johnnie, "and tell me what Pam is writing to you about now. Why, you got a letter from her only a while ago. Lord, what a time we did have answering it! and what a nice fancy sketch of life in Florida we did give her, you and I. You couldn't have written such a letter alone to save your soul."

"I know it," said King. "You can lie better than me, and I dare say Pam thinks we have a denced neat shooting-box. And your description of yourself, my swell young bachelor friend! Lord, Johnnie, that letter was a masterpiece."

"Now we'll send her a better one," cried Johnnie. "Go ahead: let's hear what she's got to say this time. It's just like a woman to take an interest in the black sheep of the family."

"She was eating bread and jam in the nursery when I cleared out," King began, pensively. "She was a sweet little thing then, and old Aunt Pam was always giving her mugs and spoons. Aunt Pam left her everything—close onto a hundred thousand pounds, I fancy."

Johnnie whistled. "A hundred thousand pounds!" he repeated, and he relapsed into a reverie which lasted while King read the letter. It was not a long letter, but the contents had a strange effect upon him. He turned white to the lips, he looked at the stamp on the envelope blankly, and at last he said, in a trembling voice,

"It's all the fault of that lying letter you wrote

for me. She is coming here to visit me. She is in Jacksonville with Mrs. Debenham — she was Kate Mowbray, and she rode to hounds better than any gal in the county. Yes, Pam is in Jacksonville, and she'll be up here in no time, she and her maid. She thought at first she would surprise us, but then she decided to send this letter. She takes the steamer that leaves Jacksonville Wednesday noon, and here it is Monday. A letter wouldn't reach her in time, there ain't a telegraph, and we can't stop her, Johnnie."

He stood still, and looked at his henchman in despair. They were close to the palace now, so close that they saw the negroes and dogs sitting on the palace steps, and heard Mammy Sue and Lena laughing together. A waggish sportsman had given the place its name, and the name had been taken up by all Lime Landing, until, if any one asked Mammy Sue's two-year-old where he lived, he answered, gravely, "Over to the palace."

It was an unpainted one-story pine shanty, divided into two rooms, and standing a few feet from the ground, giving a space beneath for hogs and dogs, and tin cans, broken bottles, old boots, and rusty kettles. In a lean-to the Sue family had slept until it grew too large and overflowed into the sitting-room of the palace, and there the little negroes in cold weather lay about the floor near the open fireplace. The farther room contained rough beds for the King and his henchman, and their scanty wardrobe hung on pegs driven into the wood.

The palace without was fairer than it was within, for sweet yellow jasmine climbed up to the very

roof, and then reached out to fall over the chicken-pens and the horse's shanty. The cleared space about the close-clustering buildings was hemmed in on all sides by orange-trees laden with fruit, and to the east the river gleamed in the sunlight. Sometimes from the river came the hoarse, bellowing cries of alligators, and if a foolish young dog strayed down to the bank, he was not likely to ever stray back home again.

King viewed his domain sadly.

"Johnnie," he said, "what are we going to do?"

Johnnie laughed. "It is a mess, and no mistake. A dainty young Englishwoman, with a maid, a bathtub, six boxes, curling tongs, little high-heeled slippers, lace handkerchiefs—she at the palace! Mammy Sue and Lena and the mokes have got to clear out, that's certain."

"Mammy Sue and Lena and the mokes," King repeated, blankly. "I tell you, Johnnie, she sha'n't come," he shouted, in sudden wrath and shame, "she sha'n't see how I'm living—me, Geoffrey King's son! me in a sty like that, running over with niggers and fleas!"

He strode forward, crying and swearing, and entered the palace, where he found Mammy Sue and Lena mending their clothes. He drove them forth fiercely, he kicked at the dogs, he discovered a little negro curled up in a ball on the bed, and he would have tossed the creature through the window if Johnnie had not interfered.

"Lemme alone," cried King. "It's my house, not yours, and I am tired of having niggers under my feet all the time."

"Where is that portrait of Pam?" asked Johnnie, irrelevantly; but his question diverted King, who set about searching for the portrait at once.

It was not easy to find anything so small as a photograph in the palace. The sitting-room had not been put in order for years, and this morning it seemed in greater confusion than ever before. On the table were the unwashed dishes from breakfast, licked clean, however, by the pickaninnies and the pups. Under the table were dirty socks, an old portfolio crammed full of letters, a few over-ripe oranges, a can of powder, and two or three broken pipes. It was too warm a day for a fire, but the half-burned logs from the last fire lay on the hearth. The high mantel-shelf held tobacco pouches, old newspapers, a book or two, more unwashed dishes, and a pile of neat little volumes wherein were recorded in ink now faded the sums that King had once won or lost, and generally lost, on English race grounds. Over the mantel was tacked a sketch of his old home, a fine country-house, and a portrait of his old father, a high-nosed gentleman. Johnnie had no such souvenirs. He had once said frankly that he had started on his travels in such haste that he had not had time to slip the family portraits into his pocket, and King's grim response was that it was because the aforesaid pockets were full of the family spoons.

The photograph of Pam was finally found in a broken pitcher, and both men looked earnestly at the fresh, sweet young face.

"She might help you out of the bog," said Johnnie. "She seems to have taken a fancy to you."

"My debts have been paid three times, and I

won't ask to have 'em paid again," King returned. "And besides, what if they were paid?"

"You could go back to England," Johnnie answered. "Then if there happened to be an allowance from that big brother—" He broke off, and eyed King shrewdly. "Was it only debt that drove you over here," he added, "or was it—"

"Some such scrape as yours?" cried King, fiercely. "No. Do you think all the poor devils in Florida are of your stamp? I know enough about you, Johnnie, and I know that if you were where you belong, you would be in—well, not in the palace."

Johnnie only laughed. "All right, old man, blaze away; but if you go back to England, I wish you would leave my measure with a good tailor in London."

The idea of going back to his own country was so sweet to King that he sat down with Pam's portrait in his hand to think the alluring prospect over.

"Maybe," he muttered. "She's got such a lot that she'd hardly feel it. And what does a woman want o' so much money?"

Johnnie eyed him again. "Old man," he said, "if you expect your sister to help you, she must never see the palace. A sight of the house you have lived in for ten years would not prejudice her in your favor, especially when she compared it with the description you wrote." King looked puzzled, and waited for what was to follow. "Suppose," said Johnnie, "I ride down to Enterprise to-day—it's only thirty miles by the short-cut, and the mare's fresh—and catch to-morrow's steamer, and then I am in Jacksonville Wednesday morning, just in time to pre-

vent Pam from coming up here. I can introduce myself, and as she had such a favorable account of me in your letter, she will receive me civilly, I hope. And I'll say you had to go to the coast on business, and then I'll tell her we're re-papering the palace, or that the carpenters are tearing down one side to add a billiard-room—see? and so you can't receive her, but you'll pay her a visit in Jacksonville soon."

"That is very neat," said King, "but I guess I'll go and do all that lying myself. Yes, I'll go to-day."

Johnnie's face darkened, but he shrugged his shoulders. "All right," he said; "but you want to start pretty soon. It ain't a pleasant road after dark."

King was so elated with Johnnie's clever scheme that he drank a pint or so of whiskey, and then strolled over to the tavern to acquaint his friends with the news of his proposed journey to Jacksonville. On the threshold of the tavern he met the captain of the *Seminola*. Both men tried to enter, there was an oath, a push, and then the captain dealt King a blow on the face, whereupon King threw the captain down the short flight of steps. After that he treated everybody, for he had a pocketful of money, and when at dusk he reeled back to the palace, he was very drunk, and the blow the captain had given him was slowly shutting one eye. He flung himself on his bed.

"Johnnie," he said, "you go see Pam. She's at the Saint James. Tell her we've got the small-pox; tell her the palace is burned down—tell her anything, but keep her away from here. Got any money?"

"No," Johnnie answered, and King gave him a little roll of bills.

"You'll want to smarten up a bit," he said; "and

don't you disgrace me. You see there ain't a house in England where I ain't welcome; but you tell her that I'll be in Jacksonville soon as my dam eyes looks fit. You needn't stay long."

"That depends," said Johnnie, under his breath. He put King to bed, covered him with dirty quilts, old clothes, and Mammy Sue's discarded petticoats; then he went forth to saddle the mare for the thirty-mile ride; and just as the moon rose up above the sad, moss-hung oaks, he galloped gayly northward, singing in his mellow voice,

"'Fi des coquettes maniérées !
Fi des bégueules du grand ton !
Je préfère à ces mijaurées
Ma Jeannette, ma Jeanneton !'"

PART II.

The King did not go to Jacksonville so soon as he had proposed, for the simple reason that he had no money, having given his last dollar to Johnnie; and Johnnie, instead of returning, sent a letter. The henchman had done his work well.

"I have made it all right, you see," he wrote; "Pam thinks the palace is burned down, and that you have gone to the coast on important business. As she and her duenna are much too proud to speak to any one in the hotel, they won't learn anything that they had as well not know. Only you keep away and don't write, for the postmark would give me the lie. I was lucky enough to win a little something at cards the other night, so I can stay another week or two as well as not."

"I'd like to know why I've got to keep away," said

King to himself as he put Johnnie's letter into his pocket, "and I'd like to know why he is going to stay another week. What is Johnnie up to, I wonder?"

The next time the *Seminola* came to Lime Landing she brought a letter from Pam, who, after condoling with her brother on the destruction of his house, wrote as follows:

"I don't suppose this letter will reach you until you return from the coast; but I do hope you will come to Jacksonville soon, although Mr. Gordon says that he does not see how you can get away until the orange crop is packed. He has told me all about your lovely grove, and while he tries to make light of your recent misfortune, I can see that he feels as though it were his own home that had been burned. I make him describe the house again and again; and now I can almost see you and him sitting in that little bachelor den, smoking your cigars and talking over the day's shooting. We like him so much, Mrs. Debenham and I, and Hugh Debenham thinks he is a wonderful fellow—a boy's admiration for a clever and accomplished man. How fortunate you are to have such a friend to spend the winters with you there in that lonely place, although he declares that he enjoys the solitude of Florida more than the gaiety of Newport. You and he are quite like Damon and Pythias. Everything he tells me about you strengthens my desire to see you. I remember you very well, child though I was when you went away, and I am determined to carry you back to England with me. Alec and I could easily manage the debts. Mr. Gordon says that you would not live anywhere except in Florida; but you could visit your orange-

grove every winter, even if you made England your home; and I could come with you and keep your house—your new house, I mean. We must plan that together. Mr. Gordon—”

Here King put the letter down with a droll smile; then he counted the number of times Johnnie was mentioned in the four pages, and the result made him scowl.

“He’s a dam scoundrel,” he cried. “And how he can lie!”

“Who?” asked Lena, looking up from the palmetto hat she was making.

“Well, no matter who; but I’ll stop his little game, yes, I will, though I may burn my own fingers. My sister—*my* sister! Why, he ain’t fit to clean my shoes, let alone hers. Lena, you look over my clothes and mend the best of ’em, and see if you can’t find me a decent shirt. I’m going to Jacksonville.”

It cost him a great pang to part with his gamecocks; but sold they were that very afternoon, and so was the ungathered crop of oranges, all bought by the Jew who held the mortgage on the palace grove. The Jew chuckled a little, but King felt like a rich man with that roll of greasy bills in his pocket. The next day the *Seminola* bore him away down the river. He drank almost nothing; he held himself aloof from every one, and the crew of the stern-wheel steamer reckoned that the King was up to something or other. When he reached Jacksonville, he bought a collar, a cravat, a hat, and a pair of shoes, which he donned at once; so that, as he sauntered out of the shop with a smart top-coat over his arm, he looked like a gentleman who wore shabby clothes because

he liked them better than new. Still, he hesitated about entering the hotel where his sister was staying, and idled near the door-way until he saw Johnnie coming down the steps. Was it Johnnie—Johnnie shaved clean, save for that light mustache—Johnnie in that dapper morning costume—Johnnie drawing on those irreproachable dog-skin gloves? It was the henchman indeed, and it was for him that two horses, saddled and bridled, were waiting. He did not see King, he was too busy with the straps of the side-saddle; and when the straps were properly adjusted, he had eyes only for the sweet-faced woman who ran down the steps lightly, holding up the scant skirt of her habit.

“Pam,” whispered King. Pam did not so much as glance towards the tall, lean, gray-bearded man, who started forward only to shrink back again in the little crowd of idlers, but she smiled on Johnnie, and the smile made her brother catch his breath. He watched the pair ride away; he heard the idlers say it was a handsome couple; he saw significant looks exchanged, and then, with his head held very high, he mounted the hotel steps. He had not sat long on the piazza when a buxom woman in widow’s dress took a chair near him. He stared at her; he did not recognize her; rather he divined who she was, and he presented himself to her shyly; but she received him graciously enough, although she had heard many sad stories about him in days gone by. It was Mrs. Debenham, Pam’s duenna, and King had known her when she was a girl, he a gay, light-hearted young man. She told him about people he knew; whom this one had married, how that one had

been killed by the Zulus, and how another was raising cattle in Colorado. Presently she introduced to him her son Hugh, a tall, bright-eyed youth, fresh from Eton.

"Pam ain't back yet," said Hugh, with a knowing smile.

"Not yet," his mother echoed; then, turning to King—"We like your friend very much, and Pam rides with him nearly every day. When one is in Rome, you know—"

"Oh yes, yes," said King, hastily, his anxious glance straying towards the street.

It seemed a long time before they came back, Pam and Johnnie, and they ran up the steps gayly, their faces flushed, their eyes shining, but they stopped short at the sight of King. He rose, looking at his sister.

"Well, Pam," he said, with a tremulous smile, "it's me."

"Tom!" she cried; and then, forgetting the staring people, she kissed the black sheep of the family. "Dear old boy," she whispered, "I am so sorry."

"Sorry, Pam? sorry that I came?"

"No, no, but sorry for your new trouble. As if you had not had quite enough."

Johnnie broke in at this juncture. "The fire, man," he said. "Don't look so dazed. Have you forgotten that the palace burned down a fortnight ago?"

King's face cleared. "To be sure. I swear I had forgotten it. I am so glad to see you, Pam. You look a little as Edith used to; but you're taller, ain't you?"

"Two inches taller. But tell me: have you come down to stay, or must you go back again?"

"I must go back, and, Pam, I'll take you along. There's a tavern at Lime Landing, where you can stop a day or two—just long enough to see all that's left of my palace. You know they used to call it a palace up there. Come, we'll start to-morrow morning. What do you say?"

"Say?" she repeated, "why, I say go. And you?" she turned to Johnnie, who stood by, twirling his hat.

"Oh, I must stay here," he said. "I have an engagement; but when you come back—"

Pam colored.

"When we come back," she echoed; then she went off to change her dress, and Johnnie took King up three flights of stairs to a clean little bedroom.

"King," he said, "you are as drunk as a lord. Why did you ask Pam to go up the river?"

"The idea just popped into my head," King answered, with a queer smile, "and, on my soul, I think it an uncommonly good idea."

"She will find out that we are a pair of liars," said Johnnie.

King nodded, "That's so."

Something in his manner struck Johnnie as very extraordinary. "Why, see here," he said, "if you keep your head, and let things go on for another week, it will be the best thing you ever did for yourself. Pam will get the family to pay your debts, and you can go to England."

"And you'd go along?" said King, in a tone that made Johnnie glance at him keenly.

"Certainly not, if you objected," he returned. "Indeed I couldn't get money enough to pay my passage."

King smiled. "You're pretty cunning, Johnnie;

but the fact is, I am ashamed of myself. I am going to take Pam up the river, show her the shanty, and just let her see for herself. Seeing is believing, and a woman will trust to her eyes when she wouldn't to her ears. "I am sorry to have her think ill of us, but we'll be in the same boat."

Johnnie did not look as though he found that consoling. "Well," he said, "do as you please. Only don't expect me to be near when you give your sister the shock. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and she'll think I have gulled her shamefully. And I did it for you, Tom; I lied for you."

"It was very good of you," said King, "and I thank you for the service." He rose as he spoke and moved towards the door. With his hand on the knob, he added, in his usual tone, and dropping his ironical dignity, "By - the - way, Johnnie, where did you leave the mare?"

"Oh, she's at the stable in Enterprise," Johnnie answered. "You can send Sam down for her, or I'll ride her back myself after your sister has made her visit. There isn't much room at the palace, so I'll stay away while Miss King and her maid are there. You can put the maid in the little room over the library, and you needn't mind about disturbing any traps that I piled up in there."

Johnnie laughed, and King looked at him in admiration. "You lie so well that I almost believe there is a library there," he said. "My tongue is no match for yours; but seeing is believing."

"Yes," said Johnnie, after King had gone and the door was shut—"yes, seeing *is* believing, you blundering old fool."

They all met in the dining-room presently, and the talk at table ran on smoothly, Johnnie, however, complaining a little because he was obliged to eat his dinner in the middle of the day, and Pam consoling him, saying that he surely could endure it for a while.

"I am not used to it," he returned. "King and I don't care much for breakfast and luncheon, but when seven o'clock comes we want our dinner. The dining-room at the palace was uncommonly pretty, to my thinking. We had a lot of antlers hanging around, and then there were sketches—"

"Fancy sketches," put in King.

"Do you draw and paint?" asked Pam, turning to Johnnie, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I used to," he answered.

Hugh Debenham heaved a great sigh.

"I wish the house had not been burned," he said. "I should have liked awfully well to have stopped there and got a little shooting—that is, if you could have stowed me away somewhere."

"We could have stowed you away," said King.

Mrs. Debenham looked at him with a deprecating smile. "Poor Hugh," she said. "He has wanted to see the palace ever since Mr. Gordon told him about it. I confess that I, too, should have trespassed upon your hospitality, for I have always had a great desire to visit one of the plantations in the South."

"There is nothing there now but the orange-grove," said Johnnie, "and the village tavern is no place for ladies. Otherwise, I would suggest that we all go to Lime Landing for a week or ten days."

"I am going," said Pam.

“Leave your maid here,” said her brother. “You can do your own hair, can’t you?”

“Oh yes; but, poor thing, she will be disappointed; she always likes to go everywhere. She is Bates’s daughter. You remember Bates, the old gardener?”

King nodded. Dinner was over, and he went off, with a cigar, to a corner of the piazza. Remember old Bates? Indeed he did; and as he sat alone smoking, for a sweet half-hour he was lost in memories that blotted out the present.

At noon the next day he and Pam started for Lime Landing, and Johnnie, who had freed himself from his engagement, accompanied them. It was Johnnie who sat with Pam on the deck all the afternoon and evening; it was Johnnie who the next morning showed her where the river began to widen into Lake Monroe.

“And yonder is Enterprise,” he said. “We spend the day there, and this evening we shall take the steamer that goes farther up the river. This boat is too big to get near Lime Landing.”

“What odd names the places have,” she said.

“You won’t forget them when you are back in England?”

“Oh no; I shall never forget them. And then you and my brother will be at my elbow to remind me.”

“Shall we? I hope so, but your brother does not seem overjoyed to think that I am going to England, and so perhaps I had better stay here.”

She shot a reproachful glance at him. “And does your going or staying depend on him?” she asked.

“No,” he answered, softly; and for a minute his hand rested on hers.

But soon after their arrival at Enterprise, where the hotel was overflowing with Northern people—invalids, fashionable folks, sportsmen—Johnnie disappeared. King wondered vaguely where he had gone, but his suspicions were not roused until he went to the livery-stable and found that Johnnie had ridden away hours ago on the mare.

“Mr. Gordon left this note for you,” the clerk said, when he returned to the hotel. The note ran as follows:

“DEAR KING,—I think it best to go to the coast for a fortnight. There won’t be room for us all at the palace. Say *au revoir* to your sister for me, and tell her that if I cannot show her the beauties of Lime Landing, I hope that she will some day be gracious enough to show me the beauties of her home in England. J. G.”

“Oh, the liar,” said King, gently, as he tore up the missive. He could almost see Johnnie’s mocking smile, and hear his sneering voice.

At the supper-table he gave his sister the message gravely. “You were asleep in your room,” he added, “and so Johnnie could not bid you good-bye.”

“Not good-bye—only *au revoir*; he will probably join us at Lime Landing,” said Pam, with a confident smile.

“Well, I don’t know,” King said, dubiously. “Johnnie is a bit erratic; I shouldn’t be surprised if we didn’t lay eyes on him again for years. It would be just like him to go off in this fashion, and turn up—”

“In England,” said Pam.

At dusk that evening they went aboard the dirty stern-wheel steamer. They were the only passengers, and they sat on deck late into the night, talking together earnestly, Pam trying to persuade her brother to return home with her the next May. She declared that the eldest brother would help him; she herself would help him, and he might get on his feet again if he would only not gamble. But King did not respond readily; he had lived so long in Florida that he thought he had better pass the rest of his days there.

"Think of the dreariness of it!" cried Pam. "Surely you don't suppose Mr. Gordon will spend all the winters with you? And what would you do alone?"

"I might manage it," he answered. "Time you turned in, Pam, and got a little sleep. It is pretty late."

It was late, but Pam could not stay in that unspeakable little cubby-hole where her brother put her any longer than she must, and at daybreak she was out on the deck again. She found King there. He had not tried to sleep; he had not even taken off his clothes. He was shaky and nervous, not so much from lack of sleep, as from lack of drink, for his unaccustomed abstinence told on him greatly.

The *Seminola* was on time that morning, and consequently the population of Lime Landing was not at the pier to receive her. It was so early that no one was stirring; the place seemed deserted; the tavern-keeper alone was abroad, and he stared at King and at King's companion in speechless amazement.

"Let us go and see your grove," said Pam. "It is near, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is only a few minutes' walk," he answered, and as he spoke he passed his trembling hand over his beard. "They must have had a hard rain here last night," he added, mechanically. "I don't know when I have seen things look so drenched."

"Oh, there is a mocking-bird," cried Pam; and for a minute they paused to listen to the joyous song he poured forth on the silent air.

"Come," said King, curtly, almost roughly, and he strode ahead of his sister; but at the palace gate he stopped, and peered through the orange-trees.

"Wait, Tom," said Pam, hastening after him. As though he had not heard her, he walked on swiftly and then stopped again. What he saw was this: a mass of burned wood lying black and sodden on the ground, the charred timbers glistening with rain-drops. There was nothing left of the palace. It was destroyed indeed. The dogs and hogs came towards him, a flock of pigeons wheeled near; and then he felt a soft hand slipped through his arm, and heard a soft voice say, tenderly,

"It was your home, and you loved it, Tom."

"All I had," he said. "Now—" He stared blankly at the scene of desolation. "Pam," he cried, "it is hard. I can't look at it; I can't stay here. To think it is gone! Or am I dreaming, Pam?"

"My poor brother," she murmured.

He led her back to the tavern, and saw her safe in the best chamber the house afforded; then he went into the bar-room.

"I'm re'lly sorry," said the landlord. "I'm re'lly

sorry, ole man. It burned like a piece of tinder, early last evening, just before the rain come. Mammy Sue and the rest of 'em had gone over to Gallup's for a dance. They'll feel pretty bad when they come back, and find out what's happened."

King took a big drink of whiskey. "I'd like to know how it caught fire," he said.

"Oh, Sue must ha' left a fire in the yard, and when the wind blew up, why, a spark was enough if it landed just right."

"Yes, that's so," said King. He went back to the ruins; he scrutinized the ground with a sharp eye, and a few rods north of where the palace had stood he found a dog-skin glove. He kicked it aside and went on in the same direction until he reached a dense clump of palmettos, and there stood his own mare tethered to a tree. She was saddled and bridled, and she greeted her master with an eager, hungry neigh.

"Come from Enterprise last night?" King said, and she rubbed her nose against his sleeve for answer. He opened the saddle-bags; they contained a few articles of clothing belonging to Johnnie, all soaked by the heavy rain of the night before. King stood for a few minutes, gnawing his mustache.

"Where is he?" he muttered. "He meant to ride off and keep out o' my way. What happened to hinder?"

Swearing and talking incoherently to himself, he went back to the pile of ashes; a faint, sickly odor rose in the air, mingled with the smell of burned wood, and overhead wheeled a great, loathsome bird, the scout of a scavenger crew. As though the bird

had told him what to do, King cut a limb from an orange-tree, and thrust it among the charred timbers; but when he pushed back the broken bricks of the chimney, a sight met his eyes that made him stop in his work for an instant; then he smiled, and drew out of the ashes a boot-heel with the spur attached.

"Caught in his own trap!" he cried aloud. "Drunk, likely — stumbled, fell! That's why he didn't steal my horse as well as burn my house."

The carrion crow circled nearer and nearer, sweeping down over the ruins, and he beckoned to it.

"Come; you can have all that's left of him. He lived off me—now you feast off his carcass."

Laughing, he turned and made his way to the tavern, but the triumphant look faded from his face when he saw his sister — his sister, a gentlewoman from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot, sitting there in that wretched little tavern.

"Pam," he said, "this is no place for you; I ought not to have brought you. Are you afraid to ride down to Enterprise? It's a bad road, but it's only thirty miles, and you can send your box by the boat. I must quit this place; it suffocates me."

She looked at him in bewilderment. "As you like," she said, submissively. "You can leave word for Mr. Gordon. I suppose he will be here in a day or two."

"If you ever see him again, it will surprise the angels in heaven," he muttered.

She did not hear all he said.

"See him again?" she echoed, and as she spoke a faint flush stole into her cheeks. "Indeed I shall—at least so I hope."

"Hope?" her brother echoed, passing his hand over his dry lips. "Pam," he began, and she looked up at him with a quick, expectant smile—"Pam, we can leave here in an hour." Then he hesitated. "And I swear I can't come back," he exclaimed.

"Why?" she asked.

He would not tell her; he never told her. When he bade her farewell on the deck of the ocean steamer that was to bear her home to England, he saw that she had grown anxious-eyed, and she asked, with a little attempt at carelessness, what had become of his friend. King shrugged his shoulders, and said grimly that he did not know.

"I dare say he is in England at this minute," said Pam, and her brother held his peace.

He meant to write to her that summer; and once in Colorado he began a letter, but he tore it up, muttering to himself,

"She has forgotten him by this time."

MRS. BRAYFIELD.

DURING my sojourn in Düsseldorf-on-the-Rhine, I lived for several months in a German family. Living also in this family were two English ladies, a Mrs. Brayfield and her daughter. The mother was a fat, large-boned woman, with a russet-red complexion and very black hair. The daughter was quieter in appearance and manner, and although not a clever girl, was an indefatigable student, and industrious to an astonishing degree. She had a German lesson every day, and a music lesson twice a week. Therefore, when she was not practising scales with patient zeal she was bending over grammars and dictionaries, struggling with the *achs* and *ichs* of the German language. In marked contrast sat the mother near, with folded hands, an air of happy idleness about her. Distressed at this, our German *hausfrau* taught Mrs. Brayfield to knit. Thereupon the latter began the manufacture of a gray woollen stocking. My acquaintance with Mrs. Brayfield lasted some four or five months, and when we parted that stocking was not yet heeled.

“Really,” she used to exclaim, bursting into my room—“really, I never saw such girls as you and my daughter. When I was young I did not worry about German and Latin and thorough-bass. Even when you read English, it is Chaucer or some such old

thing that one needs a dictionary and a history of England to understand. When I was young I used to sing and play a little, and I danced, and I was the best rider in the county, and I had beaux by the dozen. But nowadays?—why, a girl must at least paint in water-colors!”

And she gazed at me anxiously through her eyeglasses.

“Yes,” I echoed, “at least paint in water-colors.”

“And there’s Fanny,” continued Mrs. Brayfield. “Fanny is a good girl; I could not ask a better daughter, but I do wish she liked dancing and all that. Do you care for dancing, Miss Gray?”

“Not at all,” I replied.

“Of course not,” said Mrs. Brayfield, an accent of irritated desperation diffusing itself through her voice. “No; you are intellectual, too. Dear me! I wonder what time it is?” With this she pulled out her watch. “Past one o’clock, I declare. Dinner is always late here, and such dinners! Day before yesterday, veal; yesterday, fresh pork; and to-day I am sure it will be sausage. Do you like sausage, Miss Gray?”

“Sometimes,” was my answer, given laconically and with a glance towards “Hermann und Dorothea,” whose history I was longing to continue.

“Sausage and veal,” repeated Mrs. Brayfield, in a tone of contemplative contempt. “Now wouldn’t it be nice if we could have ribs of beef such as we have in England?”

It was useless to remind Mrs. Brayfield that I was an American; she invariably disregarded the fact, and alluded to England and London as though I had

been born under the shadow of Westminster Abbey itself. Moreover, she always stated the prices of everything to me in pounds, shillings, and pence, which gave me an infinite amount of trouble. Mental arithmetic was never my *forte*, and when Mrs. Brayfield talked about pounds and shillings, I was obliged to go through an elaborate calculation before I arrived at a correct idea as to the value of things. She never mastered German money, simple as it is. When I was beguiled into going on shopping expeditions with her, I usually did the talking, as Mrs. Brayfield spoke no German; so, when the shopman told me the price of something, and I repeated it to Mrs. Brayfield, I was straightway met with,

“Forty-seven marks and six pfennige. How many pounds is that?”

Then I reduced the forty-seven marks and six pfennige into dollars and cents, multiplied by five, and that was as nearly right as I could get the amount. But it involved arithmetical intricacies and difficulties which can only be appreciated by the unmathematical-minded. It may be readily inferred that I was very wary about going on shopping expeditions with Mrs. Brayfield, although to decline her invitations often required considerable diplomacy, for I could not be rude and refuse point-blank to accompany her. The person who could have treated Mrs. Brayfield rudely must have had a heart of stone. Never in my life did I see a woman so overflowing with good-will towards others. About eleven o'clock in the morning her hospitable soul could no longer contain itself. She would come into my room, and say, persuasively,

"Now, Miss Gray, you must have a bit of luncheon with us. Only a biscuit and a glass of sherry, you know. Do come."

Often I had to go, literally swept away from my studies by the force of Mrs. Brayfield's eloquence, to drink sherry that I abhorred, and eat English biscuit that I detested.

Both mother and daughter ate more than any women I ever saw. Myself, I am not of the delicate and ethereal order, but to breakfast off chops or kidneys and coffee at eight, lunch on a sandwich and a glass of sherry at eleven, dine at one, drink coffee at four, and eat a supper of meat and vegetables at eight in the evening, is a trifle more than I am equal to.

"I *must* eat," Mrs. Brayfield used to say, with plaintive anxiety. "I have a large frame to support. And Fanny too. The child is weak, and needs good meat and wine. How the Germans live on veal and sausage is more than I can understand. Do you like sausage, Miss Gray?"

"Sometimes," would be my reply. I think she asked me if I liked sausage every time that I saw her. Why she was so anxious as to the sausage I never quite understood.

There also lived in this family a German artist, a bachelor, Herr Vogel by name, who spoke English very well. He was a little, elderly man, with sloping shoulders, faded blond hair and mustache, and with a general air of shabby dejection about him. We saw him only at meals, and sometimes for an hour in the evening. He seemed to be industrious, and trotted off to his studio every morning and painted away at

the weakest and most vapid sort of pictures it has ever been my misfortune to behold.

Mrs. Brayfield, for some unaccountable reason, had a great desire to visit Vogel's studio. She teased the poor man about it with a beautiful persistency. Finally he said one day, in tones of submission that were almost pathetic,

"Yes, you may come. But there is nothing to see—and it is very dirty."

But not at all abashed by this uninviting description, Mrs. Brayfield marched thither that very afternoon, taking her daughter and me passively in her train. Little Vogel met us at the door with a deprecating smile, and ushered us in. An artist's studio was no novelty to me, but I looked at the sketches and studies with at least a decent show of interest, while Mrs. Brayfield swept about with an uplifted glass, and gazed at everything with exclamations of delight. When we had taken leave and had struck the sidewalk, she turned to me and said impressively,

"Herr Vogel has wonderful talent."

"Wonderful!" I echoed. Long experience had taught me that it was wise not to enter into the realms of criticism with people of Mrs. Brayfield's calibre.

"He must make a good bit of money by his pictures," she continued. "And he can surely paint a picture a week, and that makes fifty-two in a year—ah! he must make a good bit of money."

"Yes," I said.

My part in the conversations that I had with Mrs. Brayfield was insignificant, merely a sort of chorus

to her prolonged solo. It was not surprising to me that her daughter had developed into a silent creature, absorbed in her German grammar and her music. She played with a simplicity that I liked, and often when I was tired, and perhaps a trifle homesick, I would go to Mrs. Brayfield's sitting-room and ask Fanny to play something for me. On these occasions the mother would generally sit in a low, deep chair by the window, the everlasting woollen stocking in her hand.

"You think Fanny has talent, don't you?" she would say. "When we go back to London I'll take a little house in Kensington, and Fanny shall have the best grand-piano I can buy. When my dear husband was alive he used to say that Fanny had a talent for music, but I never thought it. Still it looks so now, doesn't it?"

"Decidedly so," I replied.

"Every day that I live I see proofs of my dear husband's wisdom," continued Mrs. Brayfield. "Indeed my husband seems to have been almost a prophet. He said that our boy Harry would turn out good for nothing, and so he has. He said that he was sure Fanny would prove clever, quiet though she was, and he was right there too. He even told me that after he died he was sure I would throw away my fortune, and so I have."

Mrs. Brayfield's frankness in speaking of herself and her own affairs was a source of continual astonishment to me. I had not known her a week before she told me all about the death of her husband and the subsequent loss of her fortune.

"He left me twenty-five thousand pounds, and

well invested," she would say. "And what did I do? Muddle it all away!" This with an expressive gesture of her hands. "Still I have bread-and-cheese left, and Fanny will always have enough, so I need not worry, need I?"

The story of her former wealth was repeated very often, and finally became rather a joke in the household. Once in the absence of the Brayfields, our *hausfrau* said something laughingly as to their former grandeur. Whereupon meek little Vogel spoke up with unwonted energy.

"I do not know why Mrs. Brayfield should mourn so much over her lost fortune, she has more than any of us now."

Which was probably true.

As weeks rolled past, I noticed that Mrs. Brayfield and Vogel seemed to enjoy each other's society greatly. The little man would sit and listen with most flattering attention while she related anecdotes of her former splendor. Finally, however, I was electrified by the startling announcement that he was to paint her portrait. When our *hausfrau* told me, I gasped for breath.

"How—how does he paint her?" I stammered.

"*Décolletée*," replied the *hausfrau*, with a wicked twinkle in her eye.

That very same afternoon Mrs Brayfield bustled into my room all excitement.

"Fancy," she exclaimed, "Herr Vogel has asked permission to paint my portrait. I am sure it is most flattering, but do you think it is quite proper?"

"Why not?" said I, guardedly.

"I am sure I don't know why not, but still I feel

a trifle odd about it. He paints it for himself, you know; I did not order it. I have consented, so it is too late to worry, isn't it? But at least I shall never go alone to his studio. Fanny must always accompany me. It would not be proper to go alone, would it?"

For a roaming Bohemian like myself to be appealed to upon a point of propriety struck me as exquisitely funny. I longed for my great friend to be present to enjoy the joke. But I maintained my gravity, and agreed with Mrs. Brayfield that she must be chaperoned by her daughter. A few days after I heard that the portrait was in progress, and then the subject seemed dropped.

After this I regarded Mrs. Brayfield and Vogel with fresh interest. They looked odd together. She was so big and expansive, and he was so small and insignificant. He regarded her with evident admiration, mingled with a respect that bordered upon awe. Her opinion as to him she gave with great freedom.

"He is a good soul," she would say with a benevolent smile, "and much cleverer than he looks. He could not be stupid, and paint such lovely pictures. I saw one to-day, a charming little thing. There was a woman sitting in a garden—no, not a garden, but a conservatory, you know—and a child was running away with her ball of cotton—Was it a child, Fanny dear, or was it a poodle?—And in the background there was a river, or a fountain something. Dear me, my memory is growing so bad. The picture, though, was lovely. You really ought to see it, Miss Gray. He asks ten pounds for it. That is a

good bit of money for a little picture, isn't it? It was not bigger than my two hands." With this she put her large, red, and gouty hands together in an explanatory way.

As can be easily imagined, Mrs. Brayfield's descents upon me were rather annoying at times. Rarely had I really settled myself to study or write before she took possession of my room, my arm-chair, and myself. Delicate little hints were useless, and rude I would not be. Fanny, however, rarely disturbed me, and therefore I was a trifle surprised when she entered my room one afternoon just at the hour she usually practised her interminable scales.

"Don't let me trouble you," she said, hastily, with a glance at the books and papers on the table before me. "I have only come to ask you to go to the Tonhalle Concert this evening."

"Who is going?" said I.

"Mamma and Herr Vogel and I—and you, I hope."

I hesitated, seeing which Fanny added, persuasively, with almost a beseeching accent, "Please, Miss Gray."

And Miss Gray yielded, weakly, good-natured young woman that she is, and then regretted it all the afternoon.

About half-past six we wended our way towards the Tonhalle, Mrs. Brayfield looming up magnificently beside little Vogel, while Fanny and I followed meekly in their wake. During the summer the weekly concerts were given in the Tonhalle garden, and when we arrived we found it lit up, and with many people already grouped round the little tables

that were set out irregularly here and there. We took our places at one of these little tables, and ordered a bottle of wine, as the custom is. Straightway Mrs. Brayfield fell to descanting upon the superiority of everything English over everything German.

"Fancy, Fanny dear," she began, turning towards her daughter, who was holding the programme of the music up to her near-sighted eyes, and reading it with much interest, "fancy us coming to such a beer-garden to listen to a concert! We never do this in England," she continued, now turning to Herr Vogel. "When I used to go to a concert in London, my carriage came up to the door and took me to the hall—not such a place as this, you know, but a beautiful building; and, dear me, how the ladies did dress! I used to prefer the Opera myself. You really should see an opera in London, Herr Vogel, you really should see it."

Little Vogel murmured something about hoping that he might have that pleasure, and then the music began.

For a while Mrs. Brayfield was silenced, but four-and-twenty fiddlers could not subdue her long, and soon she fell to talking again, about London, of course, and the Opera there, her ideas floating from one topic to another easily and interminably.

The people who had the misfortune to sit near us turned and looked. They might as well have hoped to silence Niagara by a stare; Mrs. Brayfield kept on in the even tenor of her way. After the first piece, the people in our immediate vicinity went away; after the second there was a like emigration;

and when the fifteen minutes of interlude came we sat alone in a desert of empty chairs.

I wondered whether Miss Brayfield noticed this; most assuredly the mother did not, or, at any rate, did not understand it, for, with a glance around us, she said,

“What dreadfully thirsty people these Germans are! Why, since the concert began all the people who were sitting near us have gone away, to get beer, of course. I can’t say I like the beer here. I’d rather have a glass of Bass’s ale any day, wouldn’t you, Miss Gray?”

To which I replied in the affirmative, vaguely wondering when she would ask me if I liked sausage.

After the interlude the orchestra played a barcarole, by Rubinstein, I think, a plaintive little thing, not free, indeed, from sentimentality. While the violins were drawing out a particularly lackadaisical passage, I chanced to glance at Vogel. He was gazing at Mrs. Brayfield with meek devotion. The widow caught his eye, and gave him a tender look in return. A horrible thought crept into my brain. Was there an elderly flirtation in progress? This idea so disgusted me that the wine tasted flat and the music sounded vulgar. Glad was I when the concert was over, the walk home accomplished, and I was once more in my room with my books. In the pages of “Soll und Haben” I forgot Mrs. Brayfield and Herr Vogel. The next day I went to Frankfort to spend a week with a friend, and so the tender glances that I had intercepted in the Tonhalle garden passed quite out of my mind.

The evening of my return, however, Mrs. Brayfield came to my room, and sat down as usual without awaiting the formality of an invitation. She glanced mysteriously around, and said,

“Are you alone?” a question which seemed to me rather superfluous, as my room was small, and scantily furnished, and totally lacking any places of concealment.

Then she said, “Are the doors locked?”

I arose and turned the keys, feeling foolish and a trifle exasperated. Then I drew up a chair and sat down opposite my guest.

For a minute she toyed with her eye-glasses; then looked up suddenly, and said,

“I am engaged to Herr Vogel.” There was a pause. I felt too stunned to say anything. Mechanically I took out my handkerchief and wiped my forehead.

“I am going to marry Herr Vogel,” repeated Mrs. Brayfield.

“What—what are you going to do with him?” I gasped, feeling it incumbent upon me to say something.

“Do with him?” echoed Mrs. Brayfield. “Why, marry him. What is the matter with you, Miss Gray?”

This last, said pretty sharply, brought me to my senses. I congratulated her, and then, interrogatively, “And, of course, Fanny is much pleased?”

“I haven’t told her yet,” replied Mrs. Brayfield. “I’ll go and tell her now. I have just ten minutes before supper. Time enough.” And with this she swept away.

Shortly after the bell rang, and I went out and took my place at the supper-table. Mrs. Brayfield was already there, serene and rosy. Fanny's place was, however, vacant, and as the meal progressed, the absent one did not appear.

"Where can Fanny be?" said Mrs. Brayfield at last. "She knows supper is ready, for I told her so myself. When I came down she had gone to her room to wash her hands, as I supposed. I'll go and see what has become of the child—be back directly," and with a broad smile that included us all she left the room.

But she did not return directly. After a while the *hausfrau* looked at me, and I looked at the *hausfrau*, and then both of us looked at Vogel.

"Something must have happened," said I at last.

"Of course," replied the *hausfrau*. "I cannot do any good, for I don't speak a word of English. Do you go up, Miss Gray, and find out what is the matter."

Accordingly I went up to Mrs. Brayfield's room, and rapped on the door. The widow opened it directly, and ushered me in.

"I am so glad you have come," she exclaimed, excitedly. "Fanny has been talking to me dreadfully—dreadfully! You see I told her all about it before supper—how Vogel and I thought we could make each other happy, and we had a mutual esteem and all that—quite as it should be, you know; and she didn't say a word, just went into her own room, to do her hair, as I supposed, and I came down to supper as gay as you please. But, now, when I went to her room, I found she had been crying until she was

a sight to behold; and she has abused me—positively abused me. And it is a shame. Why, one would think Herr Vogel and I were a pair of children, and did not know our own minds. But I shall marry him—I shall marry him!”

At this juncture the door which led into Fanny’s room opened, and the culprit appeared, red as to eyes, and swollen as to nose.

“Be good enough to come here,” she said to me, imperiously.

Accordingly I entered her room, she carefully locking the door after me.

“Did you ever hear anything worse?” she said, confronting me solemnly.

I shook my head in what I hoped was a sympathizing way.

“Fancy mamma marrying a man so beneath her as Herr Vogel!” exclaimed Fanny.

This astonished me more than ever. Evidently Fanny did not see what a pitiful fool her mother was making of herself; she only saw in the affair an unequal alliance, a view of the matter which struck me as totally new. This tragic way of taking it quite overwhelmed me.

“But she shall not marry him,” said Fanny, after a pause—“she shall not marry him. I have been writing letters, short ones, you know, to mamma’s brothers, sisters, and friends—she has six brothers and four sisters; and I have written to her most intimate friends also, and to our family lawyer and the rector of our parish. I have told them all about it, and asked each one to write to mamma upon the subject directly. Here are the notes, fifteen in all.

Won't you give them to the servant to mail this evening?"

I slipped the fifteen notes in my pocket and stole down-stairs. The important missives I put in the box on the opposite corner myself.

During the next week the postman called every day. Not only had her six brothers and four sisters, and the lawyer and the clergyman, written to Mrs. Brayfield, but also each of her dear five thousand friends.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, one day, "this makes the nineteenth letter I have received upon the subject. But no matter. The Queen and Beaconsfield, and Gladstone and John Bright may all write if they choose. I will marry Vogel."

Meanwhile the object of her devotion trotted off to his studio every morning as regularly as ever, and Fanny practised scales and studied German with her accustomed industry. One day, however, I saw her stop Herr Vogel in the corridor, and give him a package of letters.

"Read them all," she said, curtly. Catching sight of me, she added, with solemnity, "I have given Herr Vogel the letters to read that mamma has recently received upon the subject of her engagement."

Little Vogel hastened away with the package of letters in his hand, his shoulders more sloping than ever, and his blond hair more faded.

That evening at supper he did not appear, and the next day at dinner the *hausfrau* said, "Herr Vogel left town this morning."

This was put into English for Mrs. Brayfield's bene-

fit. "Left town!" she exclaimed. "He will return, of course, in a few days."

But return he did not. In his room was found a bulky package of letters addressed to Mrs. Brayfield. Upon being opened, this was found to contain only the letters from the indignant relatives and friends that Fanny had given him to read. I also was allowed to become acquainted with their contents, and after that I did not wonder that Vogel had run away. The letters from Mrs. Brayfield's brothers were blood-thirsty to a Turkish degree. Each of the six threatened a different punishment for the unfortunate Vogel. One was going to horsewhip him, another drown him in a duck-pond, another wring his neck, and so on *ad nauseam*.

Days went by, and the little, sloping-shouldered artist did not appear. Far from being mortified at her swain's abject flight, Mrs. Brayfield seemed only extremely anxious to know whither he had fled.

"Wherever could he have gone to?" she would exclaim. "And he need not have been so alarmed. My brothers wrote violently, but they would not really have done anything. Poor Herr Vogel! He has been treated badly; don't you think so, Miss Gray?"

To which I, of course, assented. But the comedy finally came to an end. Fanny dismissed her German teacher, and her rented piano was borne back to the seclusion of the warehouse. She and her mother packed up their various boxes and bundles, paid a farewell visit to the English clergyman, and one fine morning were driven off to the railway-station.

As I said "Good-bye," and wished them *bon voy-*

age, it occurred to me that I had no definite idea as to their destination. Accordingly I said, with what I hoped was an air of polite interest, "And where are you going, Mrs. Brayfield?"

She looked at me for a moment impressively; then said, in a tone of the deepest resolution, "I am going to find Vogel."

TOLD BETWEEN THE ACTS.

WHOM am I looking at so closely? Do you see that man yonder who sits in the fifth *loge* from us on the right—the man with the little blond mustache? I am looking at him, madame. Two or three years ago I knew him slightly, as travellers know each other. It was at Venice that I made his acquaintance, although before that I had seen him often, and for the first time in London. There I ran across him at every corner. He seemed to be always strolling about alone and aimlessly. That was in the summer. The following autumn I again met him, this time in Paris, where as before he strolled about the streets drearily, sometimes wandering into a shop or café, and then resuming his joyless peregrination once more.

In December I went to Nice, and this man was nearly the first person I met when I sauntered down the Promenade des Anglais. Afterwards at Rome, in the Carnival season, I saw him again. Indeed he seemed to haunt me like a ghost—a ghost in excellent-fitting coats and trousers, and irreproachable cravats and gloves.

I left Rome early in April, and travelled leisurely northward, and it was the first week in June when I found myself in Venice. Ah, madame, those were elysian days! I had sunshine by day and moonlight

by night, and little by little the peace and quiet of the place pervaded my whole being. I did not go into a church or look at a picture; indeed, I began to think that I do not care for art. I was content to lie back in a gondola, and let a big stalwart fellow, Vespasiano by name, row me where he would. Sometimes it was over the sea towards the Lido, then through the dark, narrow alleys of the town, or down the stately windings of the Grand Canal. I know nothing of architecture, madame; I am very ignorant; but those old Venetian palaces are poems. Sometimes I would see a window or a door-way that was as perfect as a sonnet. Ah, madame, those were elysian days!

Was I alone? you ask. What a world of meaning a woman can put in a little word! Was it the infinitesimal lifting of your eyebrows, or the shadow of a smile over your mouth, or the little bend of your head that put so much in that word *alone*? I answer your thought—there was no woman at my side. Had such been the situation, those days would not have been so tranquilly elysian. A woman brings delight, I grant, but not often peace, and those days in Venice were so peaceful! I used to lie in my gondola and smoke, feeling only the gentle motion through the water, seeing only the variegated houses, and hearing only the cries of the gondoliers. The odor of my cigar gratified another sense, fortunately, perhaps, for the learned tourists tell me that the smells in Venice are not good. I hope that no learned tourist will ever get to heaven. They will surely find the drainage bad, and will tear up all the golden pavements to put down new sewer-pipes.

But I knew no learned tourists in Venice, and was badgered by no æsthetic creatures who quoted poetry at me and talked of Titian and Tintoretto. In fact I was as near happiness as we mortals ever are. My hotel suited me, my digestion was in perfect order, the moonlight nights on the Grand Canal were delightful beyond words, and a tranquillizing conviction that I had enough money to pay my bills added another big drop to my cup of bliss.

From all this, madame, that I have been boring you with, you can understand how smoothly contented I felt, one evening after dinner, when I found myself in the Piazza di San Marco, seated like hundreds of others at a little table before the Café Florian. On that little table was a cup of *café noir*, and in my hand was a slender, delicious cigarette. The band was playing a melancholy waltz, and hundreds of people were strolling up and down the tessellated pavement. It was natural, madame, that thoughts of the woman I loved came stealing into my mind. I did not wish for her; it is well that fate has willed that our lives should be separate ones. And yet—I thought of her very tenderly as I sipped my coffee and smoked my cigarette there in the Piazza di San Marco at Venice.

And then I chanced to glance up, and I once more saw this young man. He, too, was sitting at a little table, and near me. Our eyes met, and we lifted our hats simultaneously, and, after a moment's pause, he said, "A fine evening?"

Madame, do you remember Heine's dissertation upon the possible horrible consequences that may follow if one does not cap the remark, "Fine weath-

er to-day?" with "Yes, to-day we have fine weather?"

Heine's grotesque ideas flashed through my mind, and I replied, half mechanically, "Yes, a fine evening."

There followed a long silence. The band played softly, the people continued to stroll slowly up and down the tessellated pavement; I lighted a fresh cigarette, I looked at my neighbor, and—I pitied him.

You know, madame, that I write sometimes, and when next I feel my fingers itching after a pen I shall write an essay upon the inconvenience of having a soft heart. My soft heart has brought nothing but trouble upon me. Therefore it was not without a little feeling of fear that I leaned towards my neighbor, and said what everybody says under such circumstances,

"Is this the first time you are at Venice?"

He glanced at me, not indeed so gratefully as I had expected.

"I have been here, I think, twenty times, perhaps twice that; so often, in fact, that I do not know how often," he replied, in an uninterested tone.

"Then it is a favorite city with you," I persisted.

He smiled; that is, his mustache moved a little.

"One must go somewhere," he said, rather grimly.

At this, madame, I fumbled after my eye-glass, and looked at the young man more closely. He was not so young after all. His blond hair had a little gray in it, and there were lines about his mouth and eyes that told a significant tale.

I was interested in him, my curiosity was roused. Men are every whit as curious as women, and not

half so honest about it. It has always been my conviction that Adam was secretly consumed with a desire to taste the forbidden fruit, but he knew his Eve, and reflected that he must have a little patience. Sooner or later Eve would surely fall a victim to her curiosity, and after tasting herself would urge the fruit upon him, which he always planned to eat; then ever after, when the subject was mentioned, he could look penitential but reproachful, and say, "The woman tempted me."

But I will be honest this time, and confess that my curiosity was roused in the case of this old-young man, and it was sheer curiosity that impelled me to cultivate his acquaintance.

And my efforts were successful. At first we met generally in the piazza after dinner, and over our coffee or liqueur enjoyed a little desultory conversation.

Very desultory, indeed, it was, for he seemed to take no interest in politics, literature, sport, stocks, anything. I tried him with every imaginable bait, but always in vain. He would answer me certainly, but in a singularly unflattering, absent manner. Once or twice the idea flashed across me that our friend was perhaps a little daft, but when he turned his clear, gray eyes upon me, all doubts as to his mental strength vanished. They were keen eyes, and trained to an extraordinary degree. They never glanced restlessly hither and thither—indeed, the whole personality of the man was tranquil—but they were always on the alert, seeing everything, forgetting nothing.

Once he and I had been to St. Lazare together,

and coming back we fell as usual into deep silence. I was watching through half-closed eyes a boat that was gliding through the water before us, its big sail glittering in the sunshine; and then there was a bird that dipped down, almost to the waves, and then soared upward again into the blue sky; and in the sky was a single little white, puffy cloud, that kept changing into all manner of shapes, from a plump cherub to a grinning dragon; and the boat, and the bird, and the cloud, I lay and looked at in silence. Some bells began to ring in Venice, and the sound came clearly out over the water towards us, rousing me a little from my dreams and visions. I wondered whether the man at my side was asleep, and I turned and looked. Asleep indeed! his gray eyes were awake enough! He was watching with singular intensity a *barca* that was approaching. There were two people in it, a man and a woman. As the boat drew nearer and nearer, the woman almost imperceptibly lowered her parasol, just enough to hide her face from us. As she passed we heard a low laugh, and caught sight of a white, well-formed hand. The man at my side was transformed. He shouted rapidly to our gondolier to turn back and pass again the *barca*. Vespasiano obeyed, and in a second we shot rapidly past the boat, so rapidly, indeed, that the woman had no time to lower her parasol again, and we saw her face. It was that of a slender young girl, with a rose-petal complexion and a pair of coquettish brown eyes.

The man at my side bestowed one rapid glance upon the girl and then sank back into his place, drawing a long breath as he did so.

I discreetly asked no questions, and we glided on in silence for several minutes; then my companion gave a little laugh, not free, indeed, from embarrassment.

"The fact is," said he, "I am looking for a certain woman."

"And do you think she is in Venice?" I hazarded.

"It is not unlikely," he replied, in a tone that ended the short conversation most decisively.

I think, madame, you will agree with me in considering this disclosure rather extraordinary and decidedly puzzling. After that I looked at my companion with a new and deeper interest. I did not know whence he had come, or whither he was going; he seemed rich, and was most assuredly a gentleman. I only knew that he was looking for a certain woman.

One evening he did not appear as usual in the piazza, nor did I see him next day; so I went to his hotel and asked for him, only to be informed that he had left Venice suddenly that very morning.

I lingered another week, and then went on to Switzerland. But I do not like Switzerland, although I admit the hotels are excellent and the mountains very big indeed. This scampering after scenery, however, seems to me so absurd! People get up at some pastoral hour to climb mountains and see sunrises, and the æsthetic murmur, "Ah! very beautiful," and talk about clouds and Turner-esque effects, and it seems to make them very happy, but to me it is, to put it mildly, fatiguing.

At Lucerne I met my friend De Mestaus, and I

asked him if he, too, was an *amateur de la belle nature*, as the French guide-books put it.

"The scenery I like best is the scenery at the Comédie-Française," he said, in his excellent English. I silently tendered him my hand, and a week later we dined together at the Café Bignon.

But, after all, Paris in July is not quite pleasant, and once more I roamed away, this time to the Rhine land.

You will not be surprised, madame, when I tell you that as I stepped on board the *Kaiser Wilhelm* at Coblenz I saw my Venetian friend on the upper deck. We met and shook hands, and I looked him in the eyes questioningly.

"Not yet," he said, answering my thought.

We chatted together a little on the steamer, and we both stepped ashore at Bonn and went to the same hotel. There we spent some time together, very much as we had spent the days at Venice; that is, we roamed about, often in utter silence, he scanning every face he encountered, and I—I going about with my head in the clouds, as is my wont.

One afternoon we were in the garden of the Hôtel Kley. You know the garden looks out over the river, and is unpleasantly popular, but we secured a table in a retired corner, a little distant from the gangs of beer-drinking, domino-playing students. The day had been warm, but now it was after sunset, and a cool breeze was blowing over the river. The garden filled rapidly. Besides the students there were the English tourists, the men in their checked suits, and the women in their poke bonnets and appalling boots. Here and there was a German fami-

ly, the father drinking beer and nursing a long pipe, while the children jumped heavily about him, and the mother sat by, knitting with stolid persistency.

I do not know which is the more exasperating, an American woman tilting to and fro in a rocking-chair, or a German woman knitting, knitting, knitting, until the needles seem so many restless, shining imps. I fancy that it requires a very high degree of—of—breeding to enable a woman to sit still, quite still, not to rock, or do fancy work, or even sway a fan. How restful is the repose of such women, and how rare are they! I never saw one among the German women, and to a hopelessly indolent individual like myself this unceasing industry is maddening.

My friend, if I may call him such, gazed at the students, at the tourists, and at the German family groups for a while, a sardonic smile playing about his lips.

“No, this is not at all the sort of thing she would like,” he said, half to himself.

“You refer to the woman for whom you are searching?” I said, interrogatively.

“Yes,” said he; then added, after a slight pause, “My wife.”

Smile if you like, madame, and let the shadow of a sneer play about your smile, but I confess boldly that I felt something moisten my eyes as that poor fellow said “My wife.”

He looked at me closely.

“Yes,” he repeated, “my wife. She was not my wife very long, and then she left me. He was a low little cur, but it is extraordinary how these sneaking

hounds please women sometimes, and he pleased her, I suppose. Anyway, she went with him, and I cannot find either of them. He is one of those men who hide; he would hide himself anywhere, for he is a coward through and through. But I shall find them both some time."

"And then?" said I.

He smiled oddly.

"And then?" he repeated. "I do not know. I used to think that I would drown him as one does a rat, and that I would punish her gently, as a man must punish a woman, but still she should suffer. Now, however, I do not know. I do not think of him often, but if I could only see her—only see her, you know?"

He broke off suddenly. Some students near clinked their glasses together and shouted "Prosit!" Then once more deep silence reigned through the garden.

After a long pause my friend drew from his pocket a velvet case, which he handed me. On the outside was stamped the name "Mary," and within there was a miniature of a very beautiful woman. It was not the mere *beauté du diable*, that dangerous *mélange* of complexion and bright eyes, but beauty of feature and form, heightened by a certain sweetness of expression, and made noble by a look of power and strength. It was not the face of a weak woman, and in my heart of hearts I envied the man who, sneaking hound that he probably was, had nevertheless been so loved by such a woman as this. I closed the case and returned it to the pale, eager-eyed man who sat opposite me.

"It is a face never to be forgotten," I said.

"So I have found," he remarked, with a grim smile.

Madame, I fear I am boring you with this long story, and the time is flying, too. The curtain will go up again soon, and we must give our attention then to the woes of Aïda. Story-telling, however, has its victims, like absinthe or opium, and holds its prey with even so relentless a clutch.

Well, to be brief, my friend and I lingered only a day or two longer in Bonn, and then parted, he going to Russia, and I no farther than Etretat. The following winter I spent in Algiers, as no one knows better than your amiable self, and during the next summer I was driven about restlessly hither and thither by my Wandering Jew spirit. In September I installed myself once more in Paris, and resolved, as I had a hundred times before, never again to quit it. My most frequent visitor in those days was my nephew, a youngster of eighteen or nineteen, fresh from dictionaries and tutors, and in Paris for the first time. I tried my best to satisfy his anxious mother, and keep the lad out of mischief, and really wearied myself in my duties as chaperon. But finally he said to me,

"Bother the Louvre, and the Hôtel Cluny, and the Panthéon, and all the rest of 'em! The fellows who have been in Paris don't talk about the Louvre and the Hôtel Cluny! I want to see a *café chantant*, and Mabilles, and— Oh well, Uncle Charles, you know better than I do what I mean." And he bestowed a monstrous wink upon me.

I sighed resignedly, and that very evening we went to Mabilles to enjoy the dreariest of spectacles,

simulated mirth, and pranks that are all paid for in hard cash.

A day or two after this I took my nephew to a certain café much frequented by young ladies with bella-donna-brilliant eyes and an abundant flow of light conversation. Some young ladies of the same description sing and dance on a small stage, and the audience is composed chiefly of callow boys and imbecile graybeards, who smile fatuously, and are happy in thinking what devils of fellows they are after all!

We ordered some refreshment for ourselves and for a small person with a yellow bonnet who had seated herself insinuatingly beside my nephew, who looked rather uncomfortable, I am delighted to say.

No, madame, you need not look shocked, or unfurl your fan ready to use it as a screen. I am not going to say anything dreadful, and there is your husband down below, and in a minute he will be here to lend you the support of his presence.

I paid no attention to my nephew, whom the small person in the yellow bonnet was attempting to engage in conversation, but gazed about me in silence, feeling immensely moral and philosophic. Soon my attention was attracted by a tall, well-formed woman who entered the café alone, and stood in the doorway, apparently irresolute. It flashed across me that I had seen her face before. It was a ruin, but the ruin of great beauty.

After pausing a moment, she glided slowly across the café, halted not far from us, and began to chatter with a fat, bald-headed Jew. Acting upon an impulsive idea, I called out, in a low tone,

“ Mary !”

She turned quickly and glanced at me.

“ So your name is Mary ?” I said, in English.

An Englishman near by made a blasphemous jest upon the name, and in the midst of the laugh that followed the woman slipped away. But I had recognized her beyond a shadow of doubt. It was the woman, madame, for whom the man in yonder box is searching. Pray God he may never find her!

IN A CRACKER'S CABIN.

SITTING here in my arm-chair to-night, with pictures of the past rising and fading away before my mind's eye, I see many things I wish I could not see, I remember many things I would fain forget. Above all does the memory of a night in a Florida cracker's cabin thrust itself upon me, and will not be banished by the cheerful blaze of the fire at my feet, or be wafted away in the fragrant smoke of my cigar. I will tell you the story, although I know full well that if you be an intensely practical personage you will laugh, and dub me a sentimental old fellow.

My daughter and I were in Florida for the winter. Jacksonville, with its big hotels and its Saratoga-like air of fashion, wearied us, and we went to St. Augustine; but there, also, we were haunted by women in Paris gowns, and men in London coats. Perhaps my daughter and I have a touch of the savage lingering in us; but be that as it may, we certainly longed for the "pathless woods," for the "forest primeval."

Now, a friend of mine, a New York physician of sporting tastes, had given me the address of a shooting-box on the west coast of Florida, and had told me that, although it was in a wilderness, the inn was kept by very decent people, and that there was nothing to prevent my daughter going thither, provided

she did not mind "roughing it" a little. My daughter had roughed it before, and now professed no objections to roughing it again; so one pleasant day in March we bade our friends in St. Augustine adieu, and, having embarked on the extraordinary small steamboat rejoicing in the name of the *Okahumkee*, started on a voyage up the Ocklawaha.

Even stranger and more surprising than its name is this river yclept the Ocklawaha. It is indeed nothing but a deep channel in a swamp, so narrow that in some places our little boat scraped against the cypresses and water-oaks that grew up out of the water on either side, and so winding and tortuous that it was like sailing in the tracks of a drunken, reeling water-goblin. Sidney Lanier calls it "the sweetest water-lane in the world—a lane which runs for a hundred miles of pure delight betwixt hedge-rows of oaks and cypresses and palms and magnolias and mosses and manifold vine-growths; a lane clean to travel along, for there is never a speck of dust in it save the blue dust and gold dust which the wind blows out of the flags and lilies; a lane which is as if a typical woods ramble had taken shape, and as if God had turned into water and trees the recollection of some meditative stroll through the lonely seclusions of his own soul."

This description floated through my mind as I sat on the bench that encircled the pilot-house and watched the progress of the *Okahumkee* through the water. I had almost written *trees*, for it was hard to believe that we were not sailing over dry ground and through a forest. Often I thought, as I do sometimes when I am driving along a narrow coun-

try road, "Suppose we should meet a wagon coming towards us?"

It seemed to me that if we should meet a boat, either it or our *Okahumkee* would have to climb a tree. I made a remark to this effect to our negro pilot, whereat he smiled broadly.

"We has one or two passin'-places," he replied. He could not devote much time to conversation, for he was fully occupied with guiding the boat around corners so sharp as almost to be angles. He did it very skilfully, but he could not prevent the *Okahumkee* from going full tilt into the shore every now and then. There would be a soft, crushing sound, as the keel of our little boat slid smoothly up a gentle mud-bank, a crackle as it poked its intrusive nose among the reeds and bushes, and then the pilot would call out, "Dar we is ag'in!"

Instantly half a dozen darky deck-hands would rush to the prow, and by means of long poles assist the reversed paddle-wheels in persuading the *Okahumkee* to resume the channel. The first time we ran ashore, the passengers—a half-dozen perhaps in all—were frightened, and I believe one lady was so alarmed that she remained in the cabin for the rest of the voyage and read the Bible. But no amount of Bible-reading could straighten out the Ocklawaha, and we ran ashore again and again, and finally came to look upon it as an ordinary incident of travel. We even grew used to seeing the alligators, black, ungainly shapes, that, at the approach of the steamer, tumbled awkwardly off into the water and swam slowly away. When night came on, a fire of pine chips was kindled on top of the pilot-house, and the

flames lit up the channel and cast a lurid light among the trees that stood tall and gaunt on either side, and whose branches almost met overhead. Sometimes a great bird would start up from its nest and flap heavily away. One of these birds had an unearthly mournful cry. I asked the pilot what bird it was.

"Dey calls it a limpkin," he replied, straining his eyes as he spoke to see ahead into the mysterious, winding channel. "Lille mo' light!" he called out; and the man overhead put a fresh pine log on the fire that, blazing up brightly, made every tree stand out clear and distinct.

Meanwhile one of the group of negro deck-hands at the prow had begun to sing a plaintive melody, a sort of hymn; but breaking off suddenly, he rolled out the gayest tune imaginable, although this seemed to be a hymn too. One of the verses was—

"If religion was a thing that money could buy,
The rich would live and the poor would die."

Then came a chorus that was taken up by all his companions—

"Oh, I'se troubled, I'se troubled about my soul!"

There were either a great many verses to this hymn, or else the soloist had a knack at improvisation, for even after I had gone to my state-room for the night I heard the refrain ringing out melodiously from time to time—

"Oh, I'se troubled, I'se troubled about my soul!"

On awaking the next morning I found that the steamer had stopped, and peering through the port-

hole I saw that we were made fast to a wharf. I caught a glimpse of two or three frame cabins, and beyond them a thin pine forest. I knew then that we had arrived at Silver Springs, the head of navigation on the Ocklawaha. The hamlet takes its name, of course, from some marvellous springs that bubble up out of the earth and expand into a sort of pond. Looking down into the clear depths, I could see fish darting hither and thither in water that was perfectly transparent, but tinted a brilliant blue-green as rich and vivid as the changing hues of a peacock's tail in the sunshine.

It was at this place that we bade adieu to the mocking-bird. Whether these birds haunt the inland forests I do not know, but certainly the last I heard was here. He was perched up in a lofty tree, and was pouring forth song, chatter, and what sounded very like laughter. It was hard to believe that this was the same bird I had heard a day or two before at St. Augustine, singing so sweetly and sadly in the moonlight that the strain was as melodiously melancholy as a nightingale's. The poets have neglected the mocking-bird; but I often think that Heine would have understood him and delighted in him who is indeed himself the Heine of the tree-tops, for, though mocking, deriding, ridiculing his fellow-songsters, he can be as tender and loving in his notes as the man who wrote,

“Du bist wie eine Blume.”

I once read somewhere a sonnet, written by I know not whom, which portrays the bird better than any other verse I know:

TO THE MOCKING-BIRD.

"Winged mimic of the woods, thou motley fool,
 Who shall thy gay buffoonery describe?
 Thine ever ready notes of ridicule
 Pursue thy fellows still with jest and gibe.
 Wit, sophist, songster, Yorick of thy tribe,
 To thee the palm of scoffing we ascribe,
 Arch-scoffer and mad Abbot of Misrule,
 For such thou art by day; but all night long
 Thou pour'st a soft, sweet, pensive, solemn strain,
 As if thou didst in this thy moonlight song,
 Like to the melancholy Jaques, complain,
 Musing on falsehood, violence, and wrong,
 And sighing for thy motley coat again."

Forgive me. It is an old man's fault to wander,
 and the mocking-bird has carried me far away from
 the lonely depths of Florida to the heights of Par-
 nassus. Indeed I was listening to his

"Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,"

when a large, old-fashioned barouche, drawn by two
 gaunt horses, one a hand higher than the other,
 emerged from the pine woods. This was the equi-
 page that was to take us to Ocala, a town in the in-
 terior. Our driver, a grizzled, rheumatic old fellow
 in a faded red-and-yellow livery, told us that the
 carriage had formerly belonged to a rich planter
 who had lived in the neighborhood "befoah de
 wah." He told us, too, where and when the carriage
 had been bought, and how much it had cost, and
 then added, mournfully, "De kerrige was Mass' Clif-
 ton's kerrige, and I was Mass' Clifton's nigger. Ain't
 much left o' kerrige nor nigger no more!"

Poor old fellow! I can see him now, sitting up
 on the box of the rickety barouche, the rags of his

red-and-yellow livery fluttering forlornly in the breeze, and his beaver hat showing itself rusty and dented in the bright sunshine. He was proud of us—for he said that any one could see we were not “poor white trash;” and when we reached Ocala, and drew up before the long, low, wooden tavern, he straightened his rounded back out and cracked his whip so bravely that all the pigs and pickaninies ran squealing out of the dusty road.

We stayed at this tavern over Sunday, and on Monday started for our long drive across-country to the Gulf coast. The wagon we had hired, which was of the description known as “lumber-box,” drew up before the door at nine o’clock. Our guns, fishing-rods, trunks, etc., were stowed away, we took our seats, and, amid good-byes from the loungers on the tavern piazza, drove off almost as triumphantly as we had come.

For a while there was a sort of road, and we passed houses from time to time, but soon the houses degenerated into negro cabins, few and far between, and the road became, as our driver said, “mighty dim.” This driver struck me as a surly, close-mouthed fellow. I could not understand his sullen taciturnity—a taciturnity that was proof against attempted conversation and even a cigar; for negroes, and especially negroes in the South, are full of fun and guffaw. But at last my daughter called my attention to his hair. It was as black as coal, but straight as a clay pipe-stem; and by-and-by, when he turned about, I noticed that his nose was a well-cut aquiline, and that his lips were thin. As my daughter had surmised, this man was a good deal more Seminole

Indian than negro. In spite of the assurances of the hotel-keeper that the man was a good guide and trustworthy, I felt a slow suspicion creep over me. There we were, a gouty old fellow and a girl of twenty, in the wilderness of a Florida pine forest, with a surly Indian-negro for our sole guide, philosopher, and friend. To add to my unpleasant sensations, the road grew so "dim" that at last the traces of wheels were hardly more distinct than the traces of a baby-carriage rolled over a lawn. There was nothing to prevent us from driving in any possible direction, for there was no underbrush, and the tall pines grew up at intervals almost as regular as the pillars in a cathedral. Indeed, looking down some of these long aisles, we could see the trees meet in the distant perspective. Underfoot there was only a thin, short grass, and this was often burned away cleanly and completely by forest fires. We saw these fires running here and there through the grass, following a line just beside our wagon. There was no danger—the grass was too thin for that—but it looked unpleasant to us, although the horses regarded it no more than if it had been a babbling brook, and the driver said concisely that it was "no 'count 't all." Sometimes, however, the flames would twist up and around a tall pine, burning the bark off and leaving the tree naked and scarred. The rustle of the fire in the grass was the only sound. Adown the long vistas we saw droves of deer galloping along, sometimes pausing in their flight to look at us for an instant, and then leaping away again faster than before. A man on horseback could have followed them easily enough; and how delightful it would have been

to run a horse through that wood, leaping now a tree-trunk in the path and now a little ribbon of fire in the grass, while ahead the deer scurried away in alarm! Please note that I said a man on horseback could have *followed* the deer easily enough: I said nothing about catching them.

A halt at noon for dinner, and then on again, this time in silence, for both my daughter and I had grown weary, and were content to jog on without a word, while the day faded slowly away and twilight set in.

We had been told of a house to stop at for the night, and our driver had declared that he had been over the road often before, and knew the house as well as if it had been his own; but I noticed that he guided his horses in an undecided way, and he finally stopped a man who was passing by on horseback and asked the way to Mortimer's. The man gave him some directions, whereupon our driver turned his horses square about, and we went back in our tracks, and plodded on stolidly as before. Twilight faded into night, and the moon rose clear and cast her bright, unearthly light through the pine-trees. Suddenly a figure on horseback was seen coming slowly towards us, and a man with a big sombrero drawn down over his eyes drew up beside the wagon.

"Wha's Mortimer's?" said our driver.

The man on horseback surveyed us in silence for a full minute. We could just see his gaunt, unshaven face in the moonlight. "Ye're on the wrong road," said he, deliberately.

"I reckoned so," said our guide.

Then came another silence. A big bird flapped heavily out of a nest over our heads. It was as still as the grave, and just about as cheerful.

"Where the devil is Mortimer's?" said I, sharply.

"'Bout five mile farther on," replied the man on horseback. "You must go back till you come to a swamp, then pull sharp round to the right, and keep straight ahead till you come to a house. That's Mortimer's. Evenin'." And he rode slowly away.

Accordingly we turned about again, and went on and on until the swamp stretched out before us. The moon shone bright over the black, shallow waters, in the midst of which stood a tall, solitary crane, poised on one long leg, its head huddled down among its feathers. At our approach it stretched out its thin neck, and turned slowly to look at us, then, with a sublime indifference, resumed its former attitude of statuesque repose.

It seemed hours after passing the swamp and its lonely, cynical tenant when our driver reined up his horses, and said, without so much as turning towards us, "This is Mortimer's."

I rubbed my eyes and looked, and saw a fair-sized log cabin standing in a small clearing. The door of the cabin opened, and disclosed two figures silhouetted against the light of a fire that gleamed bright through the room. These figures remained motionless a minute, then they advanced slowly towards us.

"Mr. Mortimer?" I began, interrogatively. I heard a soft laugh.

"Our name is Spooner," came the reply, in a man's voice.

Whereat my daughter spoke up quickly. "We

are belated travellers," said she; "will you give us lodging for the night?"

"We're mighty poor," came the reply again, this time in feminine accents; "but you're right welcome to what we've got."

The man, meanwhile, had let down the bars, and without a word more we drove into the clearing, amid the baying of a hound and squealing of pigs. We alighted, and were led by our hosts towards the house, which was built up on piles, and in the space beneath I caught a glimpse of the pigs that had taken refuge there at our approach.

The man helped my daughter up the irregular steps that led to the door of the cabin, while the woman rendered me a like service. We found ourselves in a fair-sized room, with a great cavern of a fireplace yawning open at one end. On the gleaming ashes the woman laid a pine log, that blazed up brightly and cast a dazzling light through the cabin. I looked at our hostess with curiosity as she stood there by the fire, for the few words she had spoken had been so gentle that I wondered whether her face corresponded. The blazing fire showed her to be a tall, slim creature, with hair, skin, and eyes of one shade of brown. She looked like a doe.

"Ye're mighty hungry, I reckon," said she, as she motioned us to seats by the fire.

"No," answered my daughter; "we brought plenty to eat with us."

I detected the anxiety in my daughter's voice, and I knew that she feared a Florida banquet more than she did the Ku-Klux Klan. "You must not trouble yourself to prepare a meal," I added.

Then the man, who was sitting back in the shadow, laughed in his sleepy way and came forward by the fire. There was nothing of the desperado, of the cut-throat, in his face. It was almost childish in its innocence. "Ye don't suppose we'd let ye go to bed empty, do ye?" said he, with a broad smile. "We don't hev many visitors down this way, but we ain't forgot how to treat 'em when they do come; hev we, Jane?"

"I reckon not," echoed Jane, gently. She had been busy among some pans and kettles that stood in a dark corner, but now she glided out into the firelight and took up a position beside her husband. They gazed at us and we at them in utter silence for a long minute. Finally the woman leaned forward and touched my daughter's cheek. "What do you put on your face to make it so white and red?" she said, naively.

My daughter laughed. "Nothing at all," said she. Naturally fair-skinned, the Southern sun had burned a bright red patch in each cheek. The woman gazed at her incredulously; then she moved softly away and brought a basin of water out of a dark corner. She dipped her apron into it, and washed my daughter's face vigorously; but the more she rubbed the redder it grew. The man laughed. "There ain't nothin' there," said he. "The gals where she comes from ain't so brown as our gals be."

The woman with a little sigh returned the basin to its corner. "I never see anythin' like onto it," said she, taking up her old position by the fire, and gazing at my daughter with renewed interest. She seemed to recollect something after a while, for she

retreated to the dark recess once more, returning soon with a large kettle, which she hung over the fire. Into this kettle she poured a quantity of water, and then with another sigh seated herself by the fire and began peeling potatoes. The man in his corner stroked his beard solemnly and said not a word—only gazed at us. The water began to sing in the kettle, and outside the rising wind soughed through the pines. A vague sense of comfort stole over me. Pretty soon the big hound that had bayed so at our approach jumped through the open doorway, and came up to the group round the fire. He looked wistfully at his master. He knew that something had happened that made his nap by the fire an uncertainty.

“This ain’t no place for you, ole fellow,” said the man. The dog wagged his tail, came a little nearer, and laid a remonstrating paw on his master’s knee. “Ye don’t mind the dog, I reckon?” said the man, appealingly, to us.

“We like him,” answered my daughter, stretching out her hand and laying it caressingly on the hound’s head.

“Jane!” cried the man, suddenly.

The woman rose in haste, and without a word her husband pointed to my daughter’s small, white hand, then touched it gently.

“Good Lord!” he exclaimed.

“I never see anything like it afore,” repeated the woman, wonderingly. She gazed at it for a moment, and then went back to her potatoes. Her curiosity, however, had now passed the speechless point, and she began to put questions to us, her husband joining

in, too, after a while. I told them where we came from, why we had come, whither we were going, and how long we meant to stay. In the midst of this our driver appeared with an armful of guns and fishing-rods, which our host took from him and stood up in a corner. Meanwhile the woman had set supper upon the table, and we sat down to it and ate bravely, my daughter doing her part with a dogged resolution that made me smile. There was a stew made of potatoes and what I guessed was venison, and tea sweetened with molasses. There were no spoons nor forks, a knife doing duty for all these.

"I was afraid it wouldn't be good enough for you," said the woman, in accents of deep gratification.

I lit a cigar and offered one to my host, which he refused, preferring his accustomed pipe. Then it was my turn to ask questions.

"No, we ain't got no children," said Mr. Spooner, in answer to my query. "We hev been married 'leven year, and I reckon we won't never hev any boys and gals. I don't care, but my woman kinder hankers arter a young 'un. My woman's 'nuff for me. We hev to work hard, but we don't complain. *She* don't get drunk, never, and she can't say as I ever touched her with a horsewhip nor nothin'."

"Down in the holler," broke in his wife, "there's a man and woman livin' in a cabin, and they gits drunk and she beats him awful. But they ain't married—and we be." There was a world of pride in her voice.

"There is a lot of mean whites roun' here," the man continued, after a pause. "They don't try to live decent, they don't try to hev a cabin that'll keep

rain out, they don't care for nothin' but whiskey. But my woman and I kind o' like to hev things nice." He turned and smiled at her as he spoke.

"There is something very pastoral about this," said my daughter to me. "I feel as though I had met Adam and Eve."

This was an aside, spoken hastily. The man had risen and brought my guns out of the corner. He handled them knowingly, and finally said, "Them's almighty good guns, but I don't reckon ye kin kill any more deer with 'em than I kin with my old flintlock."

"Good deer-shooting round here?" I queried, with all a sportsman's eagerness.

"Yes, it's good enough, only I ain't got no time for it. I hev potatoes to plant and hogs to look arter, and I ain't got no money to waste in powder and shot. And then I'd ruther kill alligators."

I faced him in amazement.

"He had an almighty good dog once, and the alligators eat him," put in his wife. "Since then he kills all the alligators he kin find."

"'Tain't no sort o' use tryin' to keep dogs here," continued the man, mournfully, "and they're derved nice critters to hev. The pond back of the cabin is full of alligators, and I can't keep the dogs from goin' in for a swim. This old dog here is too knowin' to go near the pond, but he's so old that he ain't no good. And I hate all alligators. They looks kind o' stupid, but they are knowin' as the devil. Why, if I go down by the swamp and ki-yi like a pup the derved critters poke their heads up and look around for a fresh dog to eat. An' they ain't had a

dog for a year an' more, but they don't forgit. An' they'll gobble off a white man's leg in no time, but a nigger kin swim aroun' 'em all day and not a derved alligator will touch him."

"Is that so?" I exclaimed.

"True as Bible," he replied, solemnly.

"I hev got a Bible: I kin read," said the woman.

Her husband laughed a little. "She's so derved proud of her readin'," said he, indulgently. "There ain't a woman roun' here—no, nor a man neither—that kin read. *She* was born up in Georgia; she ain't a Florida cracker, like me."

The woman glided away and brought out a pile of old newspapers. "I've read 'em all," she said, tersely, proudly.

"I'll send you some more when I go home," said I, carelessly.

The woman's sleepy brown eyes lit up. "Will you, *sure*?" said she, her low voice full of an intense eagerness.

"Of course," said I, then turned to her husband and went on talking with him about the shooting.

Not long after, the circle round the fire was broken up and we went to bed. I will not bore you with details about our sleeping accommodations. We slept well and soundly, although there were no spring-beds and undressing was an impossibility, as man and wife, my daughter and I, all shared the same room.

When I awoke the next morning the door of the cabin was standing open, and a bar of sunshine streamed into the room. Through the chinks in the log walls came the fresh morning air, and beneath the flooring I could hear the pigs grunting cheerfully.

I stepped to the door and looked out. Just round about, the land was cleared, and I saw Spooner working away diligently making a fence. There never seemed to me a more absurd bit of work. His cattle and pigs roamed through the forest, and why he had enclosed his clearing with a rail-fence I could not understand. All round about rose the tall pine-trees, except back of the house, where glittered the treacherous waters of a swamp alive with alligators.

Breakfast was soon prepared, and Spooner came into the cabin and joined us at table. "Wal," said he, "now I s'pose yer goin' off again. I'm derved sorry you can't stop a week."

"Perhaps you will go on with us," said my daughter.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, "I'd like ter; but who'd stay and take care of Jane?" Whereat Jane smiled contentedly.

Meanwhile our driver had harnessed up his horses, and we were ready to go on towards Homosassa. As delicately as I could, I asked Spooner what I owed him. I had a feeling that he was no grasping rustic. There was something of a gentleman about him, "Florida cracker" though he owned himself to be.

"Nothin' at all," he said, in answer to my question. "We don't keep a tavern, and we was derved glad to see you; and ef you come back this way you must stop with us again." Then a thought seemed to strike him, for his face lit up, and he said, with a smile, "I tell ye what ye kin do: ye kin send my woman some papers. Ye know ye said suthin' about it last night, and she's been botherin' me ever sence, a'xin' me ef I thought you meant it."

The woman smiled guiltily, and a deep flush stole over her dark cheeks. "I hope you won't forget 'em," she murmured.

"No, I shall not forget them," said I. "Tell me the post-office and county again."

She did so, and then added, "The postman comes through here on horseback once a week. He'll be s'prised to hev suthin' for me. He never brought me nothin' yet. He'll be terribly s'prised!" And she laughed like a child.

Then we drove off, they watching us until the trees hid us from sight.

My story is ended. Shall I tell you why the memory of that night in a Florida cracker's cabin is so unpleasant to me? Because I never sent that woman a single newspaper. When I reached home, I put it off from time to time, until finally I found to my dismay that I had quite forgotten the address she had given me. Sometimes a sense of my careless ingratitude stings me so that I think I must go down to Florida and look up Spooner and his wife. She is so disappointed! I picture her waiting for the postman to come; she sees him riding slowly towards the house, and with a beating heart she hastens to meet him. I can see her dark, eager face, and remark her expectant expression change to one of grieved disappointment when the postman shakes his head and rides on into the woods and is soon hidden from her sight by the pine-trees. Her husband tries to console her by saying that the folks up North are a mean lot, any way—that there ain't a decent white man there. He abuses me roundly; but I don't be-

lieve she quite loses faith in me. She rails against the mail-service, indeed, and gives it as her opinion that the postman steals the papers and sells 'em. Meanwhile there is still a glimmer of hope in her breast that some day the postman will be "terribly s'prised," halt, and hand her a package that has come all the way from New York.

And here I sit in my library, wearied by the heaps of journals and magazines about me.

DECKER'S SECOND WIFE.

PART I.

AT the close of a clear, cold day in early December, a man plodded doggedly along the turnpike that leads into the village of Shandaken. Ankle-deep in mud was this turnpike in the spring, and in summer ankle-deep in dust; but now it was frozen fast and hard, and the fall of the traveller's heavy boots resounded sharply. On either side of the road stretched dreary fields, with here and there a lonely tree standing up black and gaunt against the sky, through which the setting sun had striven to infuse a pinky flush. There were no farm-houses near, no red-painted barns, but only the rickety buildings of the brick-yard, deserted now, and with the great wheel that a blind gray horse had pulled round and round all summer, frozen fast in a heavy black slough. The whole landscape had a chilled, despondent aspect, and the bare trees and fields seemed to pray the tardy snow to come and cover their nakedness.

It was a steep pull up the hill ycleped "Brick-yard," and when the wayfarer reached the top he sat down upon a boulder to rest. Just below him lay the village, from whose comfortable houses the evening lamps began to shine out one after another. The chimneys sent up delicate curls of smoke, that to an imaginative person might have wafted an odor

of hot suppers. But the traveller seated there on the boulder did not look like an imaginative person, given to weaving delicate fancies or spinning sentimental reveries. He was tall, gaunt, and bearded, clad in a cheap, ill-fitting suit of gray, and his large, ungloved hands were those of a man who swings a hammer. His whole appearance was quite in keeping with the hard, lonesome landscape. There was a joyless look on his face as he sat and gazed down at the village: it was the look of a man who would be welcome in none of those snug dwellings, by none of those cosy firesides; and it was with a sort of sigh that he finally picked up his satchel and trudged forward again along the frozen turnpike. A gig drawn by a wiry roan mare rattled suddenly up behind him, and as the driver passed he bestowed a shrewd, inquiring look on the wayfarer.

The man afoot smiled a little. "The doctor's mare is good for another ten years, I guess," he said aloud to himself.

On down the road, through the dilapidated toll-gate, over the bridge, the man tramped steadily and with the easy confidence of one to whom every rod of ground was familiar. He passed through the straggling village street, by the post-office, blacksmith's shop, and tavern, and halted finally before a neat cottage standing in a small, well-kept yard. He paused irresolutely at the gate for an instant, then lifted the latch softly and stole up to the window, whence a gleam of light streamed through the blinds. He could see into a small room, simply furnished indeed, but with an air of comfort pervading it. There was a table in the middle set for supper,

and the lamp cast a cheerful gleam over a shining metallic teapot, some cups and saucers, a great pile of fresh white bread, a pat of butter, and a generous dishful of raspberry jam. There was a little boy sitting at the table—a rosy-cheeked, flaxen-haired, ten-year-old lad, who drummed impatiently with a spoon. Soon there entered a slim, trim woman, whose large, light-brown eyes had an indefinable expression of hardness in them. Her hair was brought smoothly down over her temples, and her collar was spotless. She looked neat, methodical, energetic, and as coldly unsympathetic as a china doll.

But the little fellow at the table ruled her with a rod of iron. He ate jam and bread-and-butter manfully, drank a great tumbler of milk, made the cat sit up and submit to having her meek nose smeared with jam, which she declined to eat, and indeed comported himself with grave independence and silent disregard of his mother's remonstrances.

The man outside the window watched and waited patiently until the supper was ended and the dishes put away. Then he stole softly up to the porch and rang the bell.

The door was opened by the boy.

"Is your—your father at home?" the stranger asked, hesitatingly.

"He is dead," answered the boy, evidently much astonished to find that all the world was not acquainted with this fact.

"Your mother, then?"

"Yes, she's in here. Come along." And the child piloted the tall stranger into the sitting-room.

"Mrs. Decker, I suppose?" said he.

The woman looked up at him quickly; a patch of red flashed into each cheek.

"I am Mrs. Decker," said she. "Won't you sit down?"

He seated himself deliberately in a large rocking-chair, and put hat and satchel on the floor.

"I called to see your husband," he remarked.

"I told you she hadn't any husband," broke in the boy. "I told you he was dead."

"Tommy," said Mrs. Decker, "go and sit in the kitchen for a while."

She turned sharply towards the child, who stood staring gravely into the stranger's face.

"No; I guess I'll stay here," Tommy answered, with much deliberation.

"Now, you run along, sonny," said the man, persuasively. "You must do as your ma says."

Very reluctantly Tommy turned and went into the adjoining room.

"I do not care to talk about my husband before the child," said Mrs. Decker, resuming her sewing. "It is best he should know as little as possible about his father. Mr. Decker died West some four years ago."

"So he died West," repeated the man, in a reflective way. "I was a great friend of Eben's, and I am sorry to hear he's dead. Did he leave you comfortably off?"

"He ran away from me, left me in debt to everybody, and with a child to support. For a week before he went, he lay dead-drunk at the tavern. I had to pay the bill for the liquor myself." Mrs. Decker never looked up as she spoke, and her tones were quiet, but her lips tightened ominously.

The stranger seemed, however, rather affected by this curt recital of what she had suffered at her husband's hands. He brought out a large red handkerchief and wiped his face as though it were bedewed with perspiration. "He wasn't much of a husband, I guess," he said at last.

Mrs. Decker laughed. "Do you call that being much of a husband?" she said, pausing in her work and looking straight into the stranger's face. "You say you were a friend of his; and perhaps you can defend him."

"No, no; I can't defend him!" the man cried, hastily. "Nobody could defend him. But I'm sorry to hear he is dead. I had business that brought me this way, and I thought I'd look Eben up. I'll say good-night now, Mrs. Decker."

He went out again into the nipping air, and walked rapidly back to the tavern. Entering the bar-room, he found no one there but the landlord himself, Josiah Bedle—a great, hearty, rubicund fellow, a Falstaff to the life. "It is a cold night," he said, with stentorian geniality. "Won't you have something to warm you up?"

"I don't drink," the stranger replied.

"What! Temp'rance?"

"Yes, temp'rance—teetotaller."

"Gosh! you don't say so!" exclaimed Mr. Bedle, looking at his guest suspiciously.

"I'd like to have some hot supper, though, and I suppose you can give me a bed for the night," said the stranger, walking up to the stove and stretching out his benumbed hands.

"Yes, you can have supper and a bed, of course."

And therewith Bedle waddled heavily out of the bar-room.

The stranger, left alone, gazed about him curiously, and finally deserted his post by the stove to inspect a dark spot under the bar-room counter. He was bending down over it when Bedle re-entered.

"Halloo! What the devil are you doing there?" he cried, sharply.

"I saw a queer-looking spot just under the counter, and I wondered what it was," his guest replied, tranquilly seating himself near the stove.

"That's a blood-stain," said Bedle, pausing and looking at it. "Eben Decker once fell just about there and bled a quart. The blood kinder soaked into the wood."

"Was he drunk?" the stranger asked, indifferently.

"Drunk as a lord," was Mr. Bedle's reply. "In fact, for about a year before he cleared out he was drunk pretty much all the time. You couldn't keep him away from a bottle of whiskey."

"Did you try very hard?" said the stranger by the stove.

There was a certain dry, peculiar intonation in the words that made Bedle turn about and look at him sharply. "Gosh! I ain't no man's keeper," he exclaimed. "If a chap comes here and wants to buy whiskey, and I have got it to sell, it ain't my lookout whether he gets drunk on it or not. But you're a temp'rance man: any one could see that you don't know about the ways of men who take a glass once in a while."

The stranger spoke not a word for some time; then he said, slowly, "I used to know Eben Decker."

"You don't say so!" Mr. Bedle exclaimed. "Did you know him out West?"

"Yes; I knew him out in Colorado. He was a hard chap, was Eben; but he wasn't *all* bad."

"All bad?" echoed the landlord. "Well, I should think not. There wasn't a kinder, better-hearted man in the country than Eben—that is, till he got drunk. But there was a queer streak in him. He cleared out one day without saying a word to anybody, and the next we heard was that he had been killed in a row somewhere West. I guess his widow wasn't very sorry. She led a pretty life of it with him; but she gets along first-rate by herself—takes boarders in the summer, and does all sorts of things. She's smart. Fact is, I always thought she was a little too smart for Eben; kinder sharp, you know—snap your nose off. The fellows used often to say that Eben Decker never would have been a sot if he hadn't had such a 'tarnal smart, sharp sort of a wife."

The stranger shook his head very gravely. "You are wrong there," he said. "From what I know of Eben Decker, I am sure he set great store by his wife. But the drink was too much for him. It is too much for most men."

With this the stranger rose and faced the fat, prosperous landlord solemnly.

"There, there!" cried Mr. Bedle, in dismay; "don't treat me to a temp'rance lecture. Come along and get your supper. It must be ready by this time." And he led the way to the dining-room, a great, barn-like place, with long tables scattered irregularly through it. On one of the tables stood a dingy lamp, that illuminated a little space and cast queer shad-

ows through the gloom surrounding it. A small cloth was spread over a tiny area of this long table, and here Mr. Bedle motioned his guest to be seated, and then left him to the tender mercies of a slatternly, sleepy wench, who brought him in some smoking tea and a dish of ham and eggs.

The stranger ate his supper hastily, and then returned to the bar-room. A group had formed round the stove by this time, and he took his place in the circle, lighted his pipe, and smoked it in silence. At first his presence cast a restraint upon those convivial souls, but a few glasses of hot whiskey-and-water loosened their tongues and set them to talking and joking together. Once or twice they tried to draw him into conversation, but his short answers soon quenched their curiosity. One young farmer did indeed try to banter him a little, but there was something about the stranger's tall, muscular frame and brawny fists that impressed the drinkers of whiskey-and-water. Temperance man that he was, he looked as though he might be very unpleasant if his anger were excited, and he was allowed to smoke his pipe in peace. At ten o'clock he bade them a grave good-night, and followed Bedle to a small, cold bed-chamber. Outside, the wind whistled sharply, and came through the ill-fitting window in gusts that made the tallow dip flicker fitfully.

"Hope you'll sleep well," said Mr. Bedle. "Good-night." And he rejoined his friends in the bar-room.

The sun the next morning shone down bravely on the fields, all glittering with hoar-frost. After an early breakfast the stranger went out on the narrow

piazza that ran along the front of the tavern, and stood there, evidently undecided whither he should direct his steps. A group of children chattering together came past, and went up the road towards the school-house that clung to a bleak hill-side a quarter of a mile away. Some distance behind them appeared Tommy Decker, alone, and rather overloaded with a big geography, an equally big slate, and two or three smaller, chubby books, that kept slipping out from under his arm. Just as he reached the tavern he felt the books sliding, slowly but surely. He gave one look at them and one at his overladen hands, and then gravely backed himself up against the fence, and thus shoved the books into place.

The man on the tavern piazza smiled at this pantomime, and then slowly descended the steps and followed the sturdy little fellow, trudging so bravely along, with the ends of a gay red scarf fluttering out behind. A few long strides and Tommy Decker felt himself overshadowed by the tall figure of the man who had been at the house the night before.

"You've got too much to carry, Tom," said the man, gently. "Suppose you let me put some of those books in my pocket."

Tom looked at him shyly. "But I'm going to school," said he.

"Well, I'll go 'long to school with you," the man replied, with a smile. "I want a walk this morning."

Tommy, still feeling rather shy, gave him a dog-eared arithmetic, a spelling-book, and a Second Reader, and these three volumes were slipped into the stranger's capacious pockets.

"Now let me have hold of your hand, Tommy," said he, grasping the little red-mittened paw, and accommodating his strides to the chubby legs of his companion. For a while they walked on in silence. "Do you like to go to school?" said the man at last.

"I have to," Tommy answered, concisely.

"Your mother says you must, eh?"

"Yes; 'cause I've got to be educated, you know. You ain't the new school-master, are you?"

"If I was, would you be afraid of me?"

Tom looked up into his face, and said, with a confidential smile, "No."

They walked on after this in silence almost to the foot of the hill. Then, at the school-house door, there appeared a spectacled young man, who shook a big bell fiercely.

"I must run," said Tommy, disengaging his hand. "I shall be late."

The stranger halted, gazed earnestly at the child for an instant, then lifted him, pressed him close to his breast, and kissed him twice. "Be a good boy, Tom," said he, as he set him upon his feet and handed him his books. He stood there and watched the youngster race up the hill, and, as he stood and watched, two big tears rolled down his cheeks and trickled into his bushy beard. Lost in thought, he turned and retraced his steps to the Widow Decker's cottage. He did not ring the bell this time, but went round the house and knocked at the side-door. In response to the summons to "come in," he entered the warm kitchen, where Mrs. Decker, neat and calm, was ironing.

"Good-morning," said she, in a tone that asked as

plainly as words why he was troubling her at such an unseemly hour. She did not for one minute pause in her work, but taking a fresh iron from the stove, applied a moist forefinger to the under side of it in a critical way. The hot iron sizzled satisfactorily, and thereupon she began to pass it with swift dexterity over a small embroidered collar.

The tall man paused in the open door-way, the crisp air blowing in about him, and stared at her for a moment in a silence that was weighted with import. "Jane, don't you know me?" said he at last.

Mrs. Decker replied not a word, but the color flamed into her face, and she pressed her lips tight together.

"Jane," said he, "I'm Eben. I can prove it easy enough."

"You needn't to," she answered, dryly. "I knew you the minute you came in last night."

He seemed paralyzed by this, and stood motionless, then entered the kitchen, closing the door gently behind him. "You ain't very glad to see me," he said, in mild accents.

She ironed the collar viciously. "I don't know why I should be glad to see you," she returned.

"Well, I don't know; it would seem sort o' natural if you were glad to see your husband again."

She laughed a short, fierce laugh.

"Yes, yes, I know, Jane," he exclaimed, hastily. "I wasn't an over-and-above good husband; but I ain't the same man now. I work hard, and I don't drink a drop."

She looked incredulous. "I suppose you found a gold-mine out West," she said, with quiet satire.

"No, I didn't find a gold-mine; but I came East two years ago, and ever since that I have been working in a foundry at Hartford. I have got a good place, Jane, and I could keep you and the child first-rate."

"We can keep ourselves, thank you," said she snappishly.

He passed his hand over his beard, and looked at her steadily. "I ain't going to use force or law to get you back," said he, "but I'd like to take you and Tommy to Hartford. We could live nice, and I'd insure my life."

"Yes; and how long would it be before you got drunk, and came home and gave me a scar to match this?" she cried, with intense passion, lifting up a lock of brown hair that hid a small red mark on her forehead.

The man put his hands up before his face: her reminder was a blow between the eyes for him. "Jane," he said, at last, "you must forget all that. I want you and the boy; I am all alone, and I can't stand it. I could do well by you and Tommy. It ain't natural for a man to live as I do."

"Then get another wife," said Mrs. Decker. "I won't trouble you any if you want a dozen wives. There are plenty of women in Hartford who would like to marry a prosperous, steady man like you."

He gazed at her in silence.

"You ain't hardly human, Jane," said he, slowly. "I made up my mind last night to go away without troubling you again, after hearing you speak of your husband as you did; and then you knew it was me all the time! I thought it would be best just to go

away without saying a word; but this morning I went along to school with Tom, and—" His voice broke. "Jane," he cried, "the child is as much mine as yours!"

Not a line of his wife's face softened.

"I see," said he, "it's no use urging you." He brought a scrap of paper out of his pocket, and scrawled a few laborious lines thereon. "Here is my address," he continued. "If you ever want help, or if anything should happen to Tom, you might let me know." He held out the paper to her, but she would not even look at it. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "you ain't human." He dropped the paper on the table beside her, and then, without a word more, left his wife to her solitude.

PART II.

The long winter finally gave way to spring. Mrs. Decker might be seen in her little yard, digging flower-beds, and sowing seeds, and setting out the plants that she had cherished so carefully in the house all winter. She was not the sort of woman one would picture cultivating flowers, but nevertheless she had a passion for them, and was never happier than when down on her knees before a verbenabed with a trowel in her hand. But she could not inspire Tom with any enthusiasm. He regarded a rake and spade as implements of torture, and would wield them only under compulsion. And it grieved her, as some mothers who love books are grieved by children who consider reading a bore. Mrs. Decker had a dim no-

tion that if Tom would only find pleasure in monthly roses he would grow into a great and good man.

"Here is a package of seeds for you," he cried, running into the yard one day. "Mr. Ward says they are sweet-peas, and that nobody will have any like them but you and him."

Mrs. Decker dropped the long vine that she was training over a trellis, and took the package eagerly. The seeds were wrapped loosely in a newspaper, and she saw the heading of the sheet. It was an old copy of the *Hartford Courant*. Filled with an indefinable curiosity, she glanced up and down the columns of the paper. This paragraph caught her eye: "Married.—On the 14th March, by the Rev. John Grant, Ebenezer Decker and Mary Lasher, both of this city." In her astonishment she let the seeds fall out of the paper, and then with a beating heart bent down to gather them up. She was free! Eben could never trouble her any more—could never come and take Tom away, as she had been fearful he might. She smiled triumphantly, and carried the newspaper and the seeds into the house. The latter she put into a drawer carelessly, but the newspaper she locked up in an old desk where she kept some relics, her marriage-certificate, and Eben's Hartford address. She wondered what Mary Lasher looked like—whether she was dark or fair, young or old, prudent or giddy. She tried to picture Eben as a bridegroom, and her mind reverted to the day when she had been married to him. He was a merry-eyed, blithe young fellow at that time, full of jokes, and always singing or whistling. And now—a queer sensation stole over her, and for some unaccountable

reason she seized the broom and swept the kitchen as it had not been swept before in years.

"Why, this is a regular house-cleaning," said Tom, discontentedly, when he came in and found his mother with an old green veil tied over her head and sweeping like a tornado. "You clean house all the time. I'd like to know where I am going to sit." And he gazed at his mother with reproach.

"It is all done now," she answered, humbly. "Go into the other room for a while till I get things dusted." Eben married! This Miss Mary Lasher must have been a fool to marry a man she knew nothing of. Very likely she was one of those flighty things who would die unhappy unless she could have "Mrs." on her tombstone. And she wasn't his wife, after all! Ay, there was the best part. A thought flashed into Mrs. Decker's brain. Suppose Eben was really very fond of this new wife—as fond as he had been of his first? She was probably a young girl, and he was foolish about her, as middle-aged men always are over girls. But, after all, what did it matter?

The next morning Mrs. Decker found a long gray hair in her brush, and the sight of it discouraged her. She leaned over the old-fashioned dressing-table and gazed at herself intently in the mirror. The forerunner of a deep wrinkle lined itself across her forehead; but, as she looked, a faint blush stole into her face, and she smiled in triumph; she was not so plain after all.

When she dressed she put a scrap of ribbon at her throat instead of the accustomed old brooch, and then she went down-stairs and prepared a most

tempting breakfast. She wondered if Eben's new wife made such coffee, such light biscuit. The thought that she was probably some giddy young thing who did not know how to set forth tempting viands was exhilarating. Eben had always been very appreciative of a well-spread table, and the widow's bosom swelled with a sweet sense of revenge as she gazed about her sitting-room that morning. It was the picture of cheerfulness. Through the eastern window came the spring sunshine, and in the warm rays sat the big gray cat, purring and blinking, too contented even to look at the birds that outside were twittering blithely together. There was a clean, pungent odor of coffee pervading the atmosphere, and the table with its white cloth and shining china was an object that carnal man would have gazed upon with satisfaction. And then there was Tom, rosy and serene, taking all the goods the gods—that is, his mother—provided, as no more than his due.

From that day Mrs. Decker entered into rivalry with her unknown successor. Always the most methodical and neatest of house-keepers, she now vexed her soul over the problem of the beautiful. She strove to follow the advice of the domestic column of the weekly paper, and in accordance with its instructions she one day placed a vase with flowers upon the dinner-table, and then awaited Tom's comments with anxiety. But Tom said never a word: he looked at the nosegay with great gravity. There was, however, a comical twinkle in his eye, such a twinkle as his father had once had, and before which Mrs. Decker felt rather shamefaced. It was the

twinkle in the eye of a man who is amused at feminine caprice, but is loftily indulgent.

Æsthetics, however, soon lost their charm for Mrs. Decker, and she wearied of trying to excel so vague an adversary as Eben's new wife. Her feeling of emulation gave way to one of pity. She felt sorry for the poor girl whom Eben had so deceived. Once, as she sat in the twilight thinking of the wrong that had been done, the tears almost came to her eyes. Great was Tom's astonishment when he found his mother sitting thus alone in the fading light, and looking out of the window with an expression of sadness on her face.

"Are you sick?" he asked.

"No; I am not sick," she replied, "but I feel badly."

"You are thinking about papa," he said, with awe.

The widow made no answer, but, with something very like a sigh, rose and lighted the lamp.

Mingled with her pity for the victim was resentment towards the deceiver, and this feeling grew as fast as the dandelions in the grass. She could not banish her false husband from her thoughts. As she worked about the house, mended Tom's trousers, even when weeding her beloved garden, the memory of his perfidy rankled in her heart. Her first waking thought was one that made the color flash into her cheeks and her eyes snap, and she found that in the night she awoke to dwell upon the faithlessness of the man she had once trusted. Sometimes an uncomfortable sensation crept over her as she remembered how she had treated him when he came to implore her to live with him again, but she com-

forted herself with the reflection that her conduct could not palliate his crime. A longing—vague at first, but that grew momentarily—to confront the guilty man, to wither him with her scorn, scorch him with her blazing indignation, took possession of her. At last, one day in early summer, a man walked into the bar-room of the tavern and announced that the widow Decker had gone to Hartford on business. The assembled cabinet listened to this news, and discussed it gravely.

“You needn’t tell me it’s business,” said Mr. Bedle, emphatically. “She has lived here all her life, and never had any business in Hartford before, and it’s very likely she’s had business there all of a sudden. Oh, very likely, very likely!”

His sarcasm was so severe that it silenced the other members of the cabinet for a full minute.

“Well, what’s your idea?” quoth one at last.

“My idea? Well, when a smart, spry widow takes to wearing ribbons, and looks as though butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth, and then goes off on business, my idea is that the business is with a parson.”

A white-haired old toper, whose lips were always trembling as though with the weight of the profanity that was ever upon them, chuckled in senile delight. “I guess you’ve hit it, Josh,” said he.

Mr. Bedle looked as though it were impossible for him not to hit it every time, but he said nothing.

Meanwhile the clerks in the office of a certain large foundry at Hartford had looked up from letters and ledgers to stare at a slim, neatly-dressed woman who stood in the door-way. She was no lon-

ger very young, but as she stood there the color came into her face and made her look youthful and even pretty. "Is there a workman here by the name of Eben Decker?" she said.

A portly, bald-headed young man who sat at a desk near the window smiled affably. "Yes," said he; "Eben Decker has been in our employ two or three years."

This was the junior partner, a bachelor and gallant, and his light-blue eyes rested approvingly upon the trim figure before him.

The unaccustomed scene and the eyes fixed upon her abashed the widow Decker and gave a touch of soft, womanly timidity to her appearance. "I would like to see him," said she.

The junior partner sent a clerk out to call in Decker. "And, as I suppose you would like a private interview," he added, with a smile, "just step into this room."

Thereupon he led her into an inner office—a small room containing a large table and six arm-chairs. A minute later Decker entered.

He had on a big leather apron, and his rough flannel shirt was open at the neck, and the sleeves were rolled up, disclosing his brawny arms. He looked in these familiar trappings twice the man he had in his ready-made Sunday suit. "Jane!" he cried. He closed the door behind him and came up close to her, the ruddy color fading out of his face and an anxious look gathering in his eyes. "Is Tom dead?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"No," she said, gazing at him fixedly. "Eben," she continued, solemnly, "I know all about it."

The guilty man looked at her in perplexity. "What do you mean?" said he, roughly.

A smile of scorn curled her lips. "Ah, you would like to deceive me," she said.

"Now, see here, Jane," said he, in a brisk, matter-of-fact tone: "I can't leave off work to be blowed up. If you have got anything to say, say it."

"Then I will say it," she exclaimed, hotly. "I mean that I know you are married."

A droll look flashed into his face: "Well, I don't know as there is anything wonderful in that. If you ain't aware I'm married, I don't know who is."

"I didn't come here to be laughed at," she continued, her eyes snapping with anger. "I came here to tell you that I knew you had gone and married some other woman; and you are a bigamist, Eben Decker—that's what you are."

He pursed up his mouth and whistled. "Somebody has been lying to you," he said, good-naturedly.

"Lying!" she repeated, her voice trembling. "I saw it in the paper with my own eyes—Ebenezer Decker and Mary Lasher."

"Well, it ain't me," said Eben. He looked at his wife curiously for a moment, then added, "But if it had been, you'd have been pretty mad, eh, Jane?"

She made no reply.

"I guess, Jane, you've got a kind o' soft spot in your heart for me yet—because otherwise you wouldn't have cared if I had married fifty Mary Lashers."

Mortified and overwhelmed at the mistake she had made, she said nothing. The fiery speeches she had composed were useless now.

"But you had no business to suspect me of any

such dirty doings," he continued. "Ebenezer ain't my name, and Decker is as common, 'most, as Smith. You ought to know that, whatever my failings were, I never was the kind o' man that goes around getting girls into trouble. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"How do I know it ain't true, after all?" she murmured, not quite daring, however, to look him in the face.

He was silent a minute, then said, "Jane, you ought to have your ears boxed. But if you want proof, go out and ask any man in the yard. They all know that I am living alone in a boarding-house; and a devil of a way to live it is, too."

"I believe what you have said," said she, quite humbly. "I'll go now, I guess."

But he stretched out his hand and took hers. "Hadn't you better say you will come back and be my second wife yourself?" said he.

She looked up into his face, her lips quivered, and unaccustomed tears sprang into her eyes.

"There, there, Jane," he exclaimed, hastily, putting his arm around her, and patting her cheek with awkward tenderness.

Again she looked up, a smile struggling around her lips now. "Oh, Eben!" she cried, "what do you suppose Tom will say?"

THE SOUL-SISTERS.

PART I.

“AND how do you like Florence?” said Mrs. Colton, “and how often have you been asked that question?”

“As I have been in Florence only twenty-four hours, I have not been asked that question very often,” I replied, “but I can answer it enthusiastically. Florence is delightful. I said that when I awoke this morning and saw the Campanile through my bedroom window; I said it when I crossed the Ponte Vecchio; I said it when I entered the dusky Duomo; but I said it most fervently when I found myself in your drawing-room this afternoon.”

Mrs. Colton smiled. “The same old Dick,” she said, pensively.

I do not object to being called Dick; everybody calls me Dick; but when a man is getting just a little gray—when he discovers that he can no longer eat and drink all sorts of things at all sorts of times—when eye-glasses cease to be merely ornamental—then to have the adjective “old” tacked to one’s name is not quite agreeable. Of course I did not utter these reflections: I merely sipped my tea, looked at Mrs. Colton, and sighed. To be sure, she was a few years my junior; and in the soft light of the room, shaded from the bright winter sunshine by rose-col-

ored curtains, she looked that day not an hour past four-and-twenty. No wrinkles, no gray hairs were visible; but I contented myself with the reflection that the gray hairs and wrinkles were there, hidden though they might be by Heaven alone knows what feminine jugglery. Before her was a little table, whereon stood a dainty *tête-à-tête* tea-set. She leaned back in her chair, holding a pretty painted cup in her hand, and looked as though she had drunk afternoon tea ever since she had cut her teeth. The truth was that, until her husband died and she went to Europe, she ate beefsteak and fried potatoes at half-past seven, beefsteak and mashed potatoes at one, dried beef and apple-sauce at six, dusted her ten-by-twelve parlor herself, had one new gown a season, wore two-button gloves, and went to the Methodist church. I knew this, and she knew that I knew this, but—

“Will you ring, please?” said she. “The fire is getting low.”

Accordingly I rose and pulled the bell-rope, and a solemn fellow in livery entered and put a bit of wood the size of my pen-holder on the fire.

“And how do you mean to amuse yourself here?” Mrs. Colton said, after a long pause. “Are you going to join the American clan and be frivolous?”

“I don’t know anybody in the American clan,” I replied, “except yourself and a certain Miss Benton. She used to teach school in Hartford, and my sister was her favorite pupil. I shall go and see her tomorrow, but I doubt if she will introduce me into a frivolous set, unless, indeed, she has been Europeanized out of all recognition. She may have devel-

oped into a leader of fashion, but I cannot imagine her as anything but a prim and somewhat severe spinster. I don't suppose you are acquainted with her."

"Everybody in Florence knows Miss Benton and Miss Ambler," said Mrs. Colton. "They are celebrities in their way, and are called the Soul-Sisters. They are so fond—so devoted. They are wedded to each other."

As she spoke, Mrs. Colton pursed her lips, rolled up her eyes, and gazed at the ceiling with an expression of comic sentimentality.

"Miss Benton is writing a book," she continued, "and Miss Ambler paints pictures, and both are converting naughty Roman Catholic Italy to stern Scotch Presbyterianism. They rescue little ragamuffins out of the street, and put them in a school where they learn to read the Bible and wear clothes enough to cover them decently. Poor little ragamuffins!"—here Mrs. Colton smiled sympathetically—"they would be so much happier in rags, and gambling for centesimi."

"I never heard of Miss Ambler," said I.

"No? Well, she came to Florence four or five years ago, and Miss Benton fell in love with her, or she fell in love with Miss Benton, or they fell in love with each other. They eloped. They fled to Venice, and spent their honeymoon in a gondola. After a decorous interval had elapsed they returned to Florence, took a small apartment, and set up house-keeping. Each has a little money; and a little money with a great deal of love goes far in Italy, you know." Mrs. Colton looked full of de-

moniac mischief as she spoke these last words, and I felt a shiver run down my back. Frankly, I am afraid of a sharp, satirical, amusing woman.

"It is not Miss Ambler's first *affaire du cœur*," she continued. "Years ago she loved another — a man whose name I don't know. In fact, nobody knows the name; but everybody knows the story. He was a false, perfidious wretch, and proved unfaithful — married somebody else — and poor Miss Ambler was heart-broken until she met Miss Benton and became absorbed in Fra Angelico and the evangelization of Italy. Now, I suppose, she is the happiest woman in Florence."

Mrs. Colton sighed and looked pensive, and I grew more alarmed than ever. I feared that the satirical mood had left her, and she was about to become sentimental, and perhaps, worse yet, confidential. A bachelor with a fair income is naturally suspicious when a widow sighs as Mrs. Colton sighed, when a widow looks at him as Mrs. Colton looked at me.

"I must go," said I, rising. It was abrupt, but I could not help it.

"You will come again soon and see me?" murmured Mrs. Colton. "We will talk over old times."

But I did not go so soon again after all.

That evening, in the hotel reading-room, I met an old friend, John Hull, of Rochester. I had not seen him for several years, and I was astonished to find that, although he looked hale and hearty, he had grown stout, gray, and decidedly middle-aged.

"Upon my word, I am glad to see you, Dick!" he cried, in tones that made plain the fact that he had not come to Italy for any lung-affection, and that

caused a surly old Englishman to glare at him over the top of the *Times*. After we had shaken hands, I proposed that we should go to Doney's for a chat and a glass of something; so to Doney's we went, and talked comfortably while we sipped our "American tea" (Florentine idiom, meaning grog) and smoked our cigars. Hull told me all about his business affairs, and, indeed, rather bored me with his stories of past financial successes and his schemes for the future. "But I found I was working too hard," he said at last, "and then I met with a bereavement—lost my wife"—the smile on his face went out suddenly as he spoke—"and I came to Europe to recuperate."

"I did not hear of Mrs. Hull's death," said I.

"It was very sudden—pneumonia," he returned, jerkily; and then we were both silent for a few minutes.

"You have children, haven't you?" I asked.

His face brightened again: "I have two little girls. They are at a small, home-sort of boarding-school in Poughkeepsie. I got a letter from Jennie this morning." He began fumbling in his pockets. "She writes a capital letter, and I think when she grows up she will handle a pen uncommonly well—has the knack, you know. Now, Nellie hasn't. Letter-writing to her is perfunctory, a duty, but, bless your soul, she can beat Jennie at needle-work. She is making some handkerchiefs for me now, hemming them or embroidering them. Dear me! I am sorry I haven't Jennie's letter in my pocket. It would surprise you."

I did not say how devoutly thankful I was not to

prised. For a bachelor a child's letter does possess that charm which it does for fond par-

"This grog is uncommonly good," said Hull, suddenly changing the subject. "Waiter, two more grogs. What a blessing it is that everybody speaks English! When I first made up my mind to come abroad, it worried me a little to think that I couldn't speak the languages; but everybody has English on the tip of his tongue. I suppose it is because the English and Americans are such travellers: there are lots of them living here, I am told. I have a letter of introduction to a certain Mrs. Eugene Colton, and one of my friends in Paris told me that through her I should make the acquaintance of everybody in Florence worth knowing. She is a widow—a charming one, of course—and I will introduce you to her, Dick, if she proves to be all that I have been told she is."

"Thanks. I have known her twenty years," I returned. "She is quite an elegant person—has a pretty little villa, and servants in livery. I believe she has a young daughter, too, but she is not on show yet."

"You don't like her much?" said Hull, looking at me shrewdly.

"She is a very charming woman," I replied, "and I advise you to present your letter of introduction at once. I'll tell her what a good thing you made out of mining stock, and she and all the other charming widows will smile their sweetest upon you."

Hull shook his head in a deprecatory way. "I don't feel like playing the gallant," said he.

"Perhaps not," I rejoined; "but surely you ever marry again? There are your children to be cared for. You can't keep them in a boarding-school at ever."

"No, of course not," said Hull; "but I don't like to ask a woman to marry me merely to take care of my children."

"You may fall in love," I suggested, and at that he positively reddened a little.

"So may you," he retorted.

The next afternoon I went to call upon Miss Benton. After a drive of a few minutes through dark, narrow streets, the carriage halted before a gloomy mansion that I suppose had in former times been the home of a Florentine merchant prince. The porter's wife came out of her den, and, following her directions, I plodded up three long, dreary flights of stairs, and rang a bell, over which were tacked two neat cards, one Miss Benton's, the other Miss Ambler's. A rather handsome Italian girl ushered me at once into a cosy parlor, where sat a tall, thin woman, dressed with severe simplicity, her gray hair drawn smoothly back from a stern face, and spectacles half hiding a pair of soft blue eyes. Any one who judged Ellen Benton without taking into consideration those tender, sympathetic eyes made a great blunder.

She rose and greeted me warmly, gave me an arm-chair by the fire, and made me feel at once very much at home. Naturally, the talk turned upon my sister, and I told everything I could think of about her and her husband and babies, went into raptures over Florence, indulged in the usual philippic against the Italian winter, and then the conversation languished.

iration prompted me to ask if a sketch tacked on the wall was Miss Benton's handiwork.

"No," she replied; "that was done by my friend Miss Ambler, of whom I doubt if you have heard. Your sister never told you about her, did she?"

"My sister never tells me about anybody," said I.

"Miss Ambler belongs to the Amblers of Baltimore—a good old family, but almost extinct now—so that she, like myself, is a lone woman. For several years past we have made our home together here in Florence—in this very apartment, in fact. It is a great comfort to find such a friend as I have in Mary Ambler."

"Oh, it must be," said I; "not so remarkable, perhaps, to find the friend as to keep her. Most partnerships of this sort go to pieces in a few months. Floyd Van Zandt and I once set up bachelor hall together; but we disagreed about a matter of cigars, and have been very cool to each other ever since."

"There is no danger of that happening with Mary and me," said Miss Benton, with a twinkle in her eye. "A good many of our acquaintances here prophesied that we should soon get tired of the partnership and separate, but we have not yet, and I don't believe we ever shall. Bah! it is impossible!" cried Miss Benton, in fierce scorn.

"Unless some bachelor or widower comes along and breaks in upon your peaceful realm," I retorted. I was not in the least afraid of Miss Benton. She was the same stern, soft-hearted, hard-headed, romantic spinster who in days gone by had petted my sister and winked at my flirtations with the pretty girls in

the senior class. At my jocose remark^{ely} yover her lips with a sort of good-humored contempt,

"The danger of such invasions is past so far as I am concerned," said she, "and Miss Ambler, although she is younger than I, has had a bit of experience which—well, you understand."

I nodded like a mandarin.

"Now, I never had such an experience myself," Miss Benton continued, "but I notice that it rarely afflicts the same person twice—at least, not a person like Miss Ambler. It is like the scarlet-fever."

"But some people have the scarlet-fever twice," said I.

"Miss Ambler won't," she retorted, rather fiercely. "Perhaps," she added, "I ought not to allow such a gay, dangerous bachelor as you are to meet Miss Ambler. It might endanger her peace of mind. I suppose that was what you meant."

I hastened to assure her that I was not so vain; but I was made to endure a most unmerciful teasing. She raked up all my past love-affairs, recalled little Romeoesque episodes, and poked so much fun at me that I was very grateful when the door opened, and a lady, who I knew must be Miss Ambler, entered. She had a plump, comfortable sort of figure, and a clear complexion, and it was plain that she cared more about dress than did her æsthetic soul-sister. She vanished into the bedroom for a moment, and came back without her hat and jacket, and sat down beside me. The conversation received a fresh impetus, and I heard all about the Scotch clergyman, the mission-schools, the Italian Bible and Tract Society, and was very much entertained. By-and-by

the demure Italian girl came in with the usual tea, and as she left the room she shot a wicked, laughing glance at me out of her big dark eyes.

"That is Assunta," said Miss Ambler. "We found her in the depths of poverty and degradation, and we rescued her. We are trying to make a house-maid of her, but she is not very efficient yet. Ah, the trouble I have had teaching her to read! She will never learn to write, I fear."

"Or to tell the truth," added Miss Benton, grimly. "However, she is vastly improved."

Assunta now put her head in at the door and rattled off something which I did not understand, but which had the effect of taking Miss Benton out of the room.

"I am making a very long call," I began, when I found myself alone with Miss Ambler, "but it is so pleasant to meet with an old friend again. I know no one here except yourselves and a certain Mrs. Eugene Colton."

"Ah, you know Mrs. Colton?" said Miss Ambler, lifting her eyebrows a little. "But of course you do: everybody knows Mrs. Colton. Is she a very great friend of yours?" added Miss Ambler, giving me a quick glance.

"Merely an acquaintance, although I have known her a long time," I replied. "But why do you ask me?"

Miss Ambler smiled mischievously: "I wondered whether you knew her nickname. It is unkind, perhaps, to repeat it, but she is always called the trapper. You see, she wants to marry a title."

"I hope she will trap her title, if that is what she

wants," I remarked. "She ought to, I am sure, for she is a very handsome and agreeable woman."

"She hasn't quite money enough," said Miss Ambler. "She makes a show, but the Italians understand that perfectly. She could get her title easily enough if she only had another fifty thousand."

"And perhaps her daughter is an encumbrance," said I.

"The daughter is well out of the way," Miss Ambler responded. "She has put her in a convent to be educated, she says. The poor child will surely become a Romanist. Ah! it is dreadful to see a woman neglect her child in that way! I don't care how handsome and agreeable Mrs. Colton may be—we liked her very much at first, Miss Benton and I—but then we found out about the child, and we thought it our duty to remonstrate with Mrs. Colton. It was not intrusive, for we knew her very well; but she behaved badly; she spoke as no lady ever could when Miss Benton and I begged her to take poor little Edith out of that horrid French convent."

Tears stood in Miss Ambler's eyes, and I felt sympathetic and indignant.

"If I were a mother, I could never put my only daughter in a boarding-school, let alone a dreary convent," said I, warmly. To my great surprise, Miss Ambler burst out laughing.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she exclaimed, "but you said that so oddly!"

I caught sight of my mustache in the mirror opposite, and I laughed too, for it was rather funny for me to be posing as a mother. Miss Benton en-

tered at that moment, and in a few minutes I took my leave.

I soon went again to call upon the soul-sisters, and they were kind enough to entertain a very hospitable feeling towards me, and endeavored to make my sojourn in Florence pleasant. One morning Miss Benton and I had been to the Pitti Palace, and, as we came out, a carriage dashed by, containing Mrs. Colton and John Hull.

"She has an Englishman with her," Miss Benton remarked. "A baronet, probably."

"Not a bit of a baronet," I rejoined. "It is John Hull, of Rochester—a friend of mine."

"John Hull, of Rochester?" she repeated.

"Yes; and a very good fellow, too. I must bring him to call upon you some day."

"I wouldn't have him in the house," cried Miss Benton.

Now it was my turn to be amazed. "What have you against him?" I said. "Do you know him?"

"No, I don't know him; but Mary—well, she was once engaged to him. It was a long time ago, still, I am afraid she has a soft spot in her heart for him yet. However, he is married. She told me—"

"His wife is dead," I said.

"Worse yet!" cried Miss Benton, in great excitement. "Don't let Mary even suspect he is in Florence. Don't tell him about her, or her about him. Don't mention their names to each other." Her thin face flushed and her voice trembled. "Oh, I suppose he will persuade Mary to marry him!" she added, in a sort of despair. Then she smiled at

herself. "You think me an old fool," she said, with her usual ferocity.

"No, no," I returned, in the most soothing tone I could muster. "But you really ought not to trouble yourself about the matter, for even if Miss Ambler and Hull did meet, there could be no danger. Their romance is dead and buried. Why, Hull has a daughter ten or eleven years old."

"Yes, it is nearly fifteen years since they have seen each other," said Miss Benton; "but you don't know Mary. She has often reproached herself, and declared that she behaved badly to him, and he went off and got married out of sheer pique. She has never forgotten him. She had plenty of good offers after breaking her engagement."

"I don't doubt it," I remarked. I was not wicked enough to add that the spinster who had not refused several good offers did not exist.

"And now that he is a widower with children, he wants to marry again, of course. Widowers always want to marry," Miss Benton continued. "Mary is by no means old or ugly, and if he and she should meet—Richard Logan, promise me that you will not mention their names to each other." She faced me with a solemn countenance, and I promised to respect her wishes.

"Of course you think me an old fool," she said; "but I don't care."

For some distance we walked on in silence, Miss Benton grasping a catalogue of pictures as firmly as if it were poor John Hull's neck.

"I suppose Mrs. Colton will tell him all about us," she said, presently. "That woman is a viper. No,"

she added, hastily, recollecting, perhaps, a certain saying about "charity to all," "I don't mean to be unjust; but she treated me abominably, and a saint might forgive it, but I don't believe a saint could forget. She circulated a caricature of Miss Ambler and me all over Florence, but one day she showed it to young Shumway, and he put it into the fire, and told her she ought to be ashamed of herself. Now, a woman feels such things."

"Ay, and so does a man," I returned.

"I wonder if a man who had ever had the good sense to love Mary Ambler could admire Mrs. Colton," said Miss Benton, pensively.

"Give Mrs. Colton her due," I returned. "She is handsome and amusing, and I dare say Mr. Hull does admire her immensely. To be candid, so do I; but I wouldn't marry her."

"She wouldn't have you," said Miss Benton. "You are not rich enough. Now, Mr. Hull is. He has retired from business, and is ready and willing to set up an elegant establishment in New York or Paris, and Mrs. Colton will take him, now that Count Bellegarde has slipped through her fingers. That failure discouraged her dreadfully."

"Ah, but Hull has not retired from business," I made haste to explain; "and he would not live anywhere except in Rochester. He told me so last night."

"You see him often, then?" Miss Benton asked.

"We are at the same hotel; but don't be alarmed: I will never mention Miss Ambler's name to him if I can help it."

With this assurance I left Miss Benton at the door

of her gloomy mansion, and then, as it was still early, I jumped into a *fiacre* and drove off to Mrs. Colton's. I found her and Hull drinking tea together, their chairs drawn close to the fire that for a wonder was blazing up bright, and roaring in a way that must have been quite alarming to a Florentine chimney.

"It isn't Wednesday," I said, as I entered the rose-colored room, "but I thought I would run the risk of finding you at home. I avail myself of the privilege of an old friend."

Mrs. Colton looked at me mournfully. "An old friend," she repeated. "An old friend who has left me and gone over to the soul-sisters. I have been telling Mr. Hull how those designing spinsters have drawn you into their net. It isn't proper for you to run all over Florence first with one, then with the other, then, worst of all, with both of them. You are a sad Lothario."

I bowed and said nothing. A cup of tea was handed to me then, and I amused myself stirring about the lump of sugar and watching Hull. He was certainly conscious of the widow's charms. His eyes glistened when she gave him sweet doses of flattery, and bestowed her softest glances upon him. Evidently she had heard all about the mining-stock, and it was very patent to a not unobservant bachelor that if Hull did not make love to her it would not be because he had failed to receive due encouragement.

"How is your daughter, Mrs. Colton?" I asked, abruptly.

She shot a quick, keen glance at me; she under-

stood that the soul-sisters had told me about the convent.

"Edith is very well, thank you," she replied. "I think I shall go and see her as soon as I get rid of my cold. I dare not run the risk of the Northern winter, and poor Edith is ill in the South; so the child and I are separated. But she is happy in her school, and doesn't miss me half so much as I miss her. I hope in a year or two I shall be able to spend the winters in Paris, and have Edith under my wing."

"Paris is frightfully expensive," said I.

"Yes, I know it," she returned, with a little sigh. "I could not have the comforts there that I can enjoy here in Florence. Italy is the place for a limited income; but I must have my daughter with me, even if it does entail a little privation."

"Boarding-schools are no places for girls," said Hull. "I wish my two daughters were here with me this very minute."

"They are better and happier where they are," said Mrs. Colton. "We parents spoil our children by our over-indulgence. If Edith wants a box of bon-bons, I have not the moral courage to refuse her, though I know perfectly well that they are bad for her digestion and her teeth."

"Yes, I am weak-minded too," said Hull, in a dry tone that made me smile. And then these two experienced people talked about the bringing up of children until half-past five struck, when, to my relief, Hull took his leave, and I followed his example. We preferred to walk back to the hotel, and for some distance we marched steadily forward in silence. Suddenly he turned to me, and said, "By-

the-way, this afternoon Mrs. Colton mentioned a certain Miss Ambler. Do you happen to know who she is? I used to know a lady of that name."

"I met her a fortnight ago," I replied, mindful of my promise. "She is living with another lady named Benton, who used to be a school-teacher, and whom I have known a long time."

"Well, what is Miss Ambler's Christian name?" Hull now asked.

"Her Christian name!" I exclaimed. "How the deuce should I know her Christian name, John?"

"Oh, you might have heard it," said he, mildly. "Did you ever notice her eyes?" he added, with an effort at airy nonchalance. "Are they large and brown? and is her hair dark? The Miss Ambler I used to know was a very pretty brunette."

"An old sweetheart, eh?" said I.

He laughed: "Well, yes. I suppose I might as well confess it. I came very near marrying her, too. She was seventeen or so, and one of the prettiest girls I ever saw. But she and I had a quarrel—you know how it is, Dick—and I dare say she married years ago, just as I did. I should like to see her again. A man of my age is apt to think of his first love."

"First love!" I repeated, somewhat scornfully. "You must have been at least thirty when you were engaged to her."

"My first love just the same," he rejoined, firmly. "Now, Dick, you find out whether the Miss Ambler you know is named Mary, and comes from Baltimore. Pshaw! it can't be the same one. She married Frank Haydon, I am confident."

"There is no doubt of it," I said.

"But you find out about her, will you?" he added.

What could I say to this persistent man? I consented to find out about her, ruefully wondering if, between Hull and Miss Benton, I should not get myself into a pretty scrape. I confess I avoided them both; but meet we did, in spite of my efforts, and I was plied with questions, one asking eagerly if I knew Miss Ambler's Christian name, the other if Mr. Hull had any idea that Mary was in Florence. At last, after ten days of evasions and falsehoods, I fled in despair to Rome.

PART II.

I stayed in Rome only a fortnight. Sight-seeing alone is dreary work, and, moreover, I was in mortal terror of the fever. The first headache sent me flying back to Florence as fast as an express-train could take me. Perhaps I was curious to find out whether Miss Benton had been successful in keeping the two lovers apart; but, be that as it may, I certainly was glad to get back to Florence, and the very next day after my arrival I went to call upon the soul-sisters.

I found only Miss Ambler at home, and as she came forward to greet me it struck me for the first time that not merely must she have been a very pretty girl, but that she was still a pretty woman. Her dark hair was thick, and unstreaked with gray, her eyes bright, and her complexion fresh and almost youthful. To my eyes she was more attractive than the slim, graceful, languid Madam Colton. I

stayed and chatted with her for almost an hour, but Miss Benton did not come in, and I had to leave without seeing her. I dined at the hotel that evening with Hull, and, to my great relief, he seemed to have forgotten Mary Ambler of Baltimore; but the first time I met Miss Benton I found that she had by no means forgotten John Hull, of Rochester.

"So he is going to marry Mrs. Colton?" she said, abruptly.

"It looks like it," I replied.

"Everybody says so, at any rate," said Miss Benton, "and it is certain he is always with her—in the Cascine, at the theatre, everywhere. I suppose he will put his little girls into a convent too. Mrs. Colton will cajole him so that he will think girls can't be educated outside of a convent. She will have a great deal to answer for some day."

"Suppose we prevent such a catastrophe," I said, with malice prepense. "Hull is romantic, as all stout widowers of forty-five are, and if he sees Mary Ambler, his own true love, he will surely ask her to forgive and forget the past, and go back to Rochester with him."

Miss Benton's awful look quenched me. "I can make Mary Ambler happier than a dozen fat sentimental widowers could," she said. "Richard Logan, if you dare break your promise I will—"

"Well, what will you do, Miss Benton?"

"I will marry you myself," she said, smiling grimly. "Now, be warned. But, jesting aside," she continued, more gravely, "Mary is happy now, and happiness is rare in this world. Let us two spinsters enjoy it. There is no need of rekindling an old flame."

"I won't rekindle it," I returned. "At the same time, I hope Hull will not marry Mrs. Colton. She would never be satisfied to settle down in Rochester, and he will never live anywhere else, and there would be trouble before the honeymoon had paled."

"Serve him right," said Miss Benton, sternly.

The next time I went to call upon the soul-sisters I took with me a cabinet photograph of Hull's children. It was a pretty picture. The two blond heads were pressed lovingly together, and four big eyes looked out demurely from under a mass of soft, fluffy hair. One mouth was serious, and the other curved in a smile that deepened a roguish dimple.

"What lovely children!" cried the soul-sisters, in a breath. "And whose are they?" asked Miss Ambler, while Miss Benton looked at me reproachfully. She had divined whose children they were, the shrewd spinster.

"They are two little girls who are soon to be put in the Convent of the Sacred Heart," I replied. "They have no mother."

"The poor things!" said Miss Ambler. "Haven't they any aunts?"

"No; nor grandmothers," I said.

"And is their father a Romanist?" she asked, with increasing interest.

"He has always been more of a Presbyterian than anything else; but he is to marry a lady, I hear, who leans towards the Church of Rome, and who doubtless will have a strong influence over him."

"It is the man who is going to marry Mrs. Colton," said Miss Ambler, suddenly. "He is, I know, a widower with two children. They were talking

about him the other day at Mrs. Wreaks's, but I didn't hear who he was. What is his name?"

As she asked this question, she looked me straight in the eyes. I hoped I did not blush. "John Richardson," I replied; and it was quite true, as far as it went.

"John Richardson," she repeated, in a musing tone.

Miss Benton pulled the bell-rope sharply, and Assunta appeared on the scene at once. "Assunta," she said, in fluent but fierce Italian, "why do you continually let this fire go out? I have told you repeatedly to come in every now and then and see if it were burning properly, but you disobey me. I will not permit such negligence."

Assunta's black eyes grew as big as moons, and she looked at each of us blankly. I suspect she had never before heard her mistress speak so sharply.

Poor Miss Ambler was really alarmed. "Why, Ellen," she said, gently, "the fire is not so very low."

But the fire and Assunta had to receive the abuse that a man's dog or horse sometimes gets. I stole away, feeling rather ashamed, with the photograph in my pocket. John Richardson had naturally suggested John Richardson Hull to the tender-hearted spinster, and she would doubtless madden her soul-sister for a week to come by indulging in reveries and twilight reflections. I chuckled a little as I thought of poor Miss Benton's anguish; but I felt rather frightened when I met that lady the next morning in Flor & Findel's shop.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said, ignoring the presence of the English-speaking clerk.

He, however, smiled discreetly and took himself off. "Mary has done nothing but think of her old sweetheart ever since you said John Richardson," she added.

I protested: "Ought I to have lied outright when she asked me his name?"

"You ought to have evaded it in some way," Miss Benton replied, forgetting her stern Scotch Presbyterianism for the nonce. "A clever man of the world like you making such a stupid, blundering answer! I am ashamed of you! And, any way, you had no business to bring that photograph to the house. It has made me perfectly miserable to think of those two children being put into a convent and turned into nuns, and spending all their lives among priests and sisters. I tell you it is dreadful! Such pretty children, too! I should like to give Mr. John Richardson Hull a piece of my mind."

"Well, here he comes, and you can do it at once," I rejoined, as I saw Hull come across the street. He entered the shop, and I straightway introduced him to Miss Benton, who bowed to him with freezing dignity.

We discussed the weather for a few moments, and then Hull exclaimed, hastily, "Ah, you must excuse me, but there is Mrs. Colton, and she promised to go with me to-day to buy a birthday-present for my daughter Nellie. I am sure I don't know what the child wants; a trifling thing will do, I suppose. Miss Benton, delighted to have met you. Good-morning." And he hastened out of the shop and joined Mrs. Colton, who had just walked by.

"He seems like a very good man," said Miss Ben-

ton; "but how can he think of sending his children to a convent? I suppose he is infatuated with that woman."

"That woman" looked very handsome in her trim English walking-suit, and she and Hull sauntered away, smiling at each other in the most amiable fashion, while Miss Benton and I watched them from the shop-window.

"Look at her bridle and simper," said the spinster, scornfully. "And he is so happy, so bland, so gullible! What fools men are sometimes! If it were only the man in this case, I could view the affair with calm contempt; but when I think of the children—bah!"

With this exclamation she left me abruptly, and marched away in the wake of Hull and his charmer. It began to be interesting. Would Miss Benton stick to her resolution and keep the former lovers apart? or would she relent, rout Mrs. Colton, and save Hull from her wiles by sacrificing Mary Ambler? I determined to stay in Florence and see the comedy played through.

In the course of a few days I received an invitation from Mrs. Colton to dine with her, and I accepted. I supposed, of course, that Hull would be there, but, to my surprise, I found that he was not among the guests—a polyglot collection of people, who chatted together in a confusion of French, Italian, and English. After dinner Mrs. Colton led me into her boudoir, and made me sit down on a low couch beside her.

"How delightful it is to get away from those people for a few minutes!" she said, crossing her hands

languidly in her lap. "I grow so tired of seeing them and listening to their inane chatter!"

"Then why do you invite them here?" I asked, bluntly.

She shrugged her shoulders as she replied, "I must have society; I am not a hermit. And among my numerous acquaintances I have a few friends whom I prize very highly—you, for instance."

"Thanks," I said; "and where does Mr. Hull come in?—among the inane chatterers or the valued friends?"

She looked down at her hands in silence, and began to turn a big ruby ring around slowly. Finally she smiled, and said, as though to herself, "Poor Mr. Hull!"

This nettled me a little. "I don't see why you accy poor Mr. Hull," I returned. "To be sure, he has pead the misfortune to lose his wife, but that was over a year ago, and time will heal the wound. He is in superb health, he has two beautiful children, he is rich enough, and I don't see why he is to be pitied."

"Don't you?" she said, with an assumption of girlish roguishness that exasperated me.

"No, I do not," said I, bluntly, "unless you are really going to marry him, and then I do pity him—" I saw her flush in a dangerous way, so I added in precisely the same tone as before—"because in that case he will have a duel on his hands with all the men in Florence."

It was clumsy, it was coarse, but it served the purpose. Her angry flush faded away, and was replaced by an amiable smile. "The same old flattering Dick," said she.

After that I soon invented an engagement to play whist with some men at the club, and took myself off. As I neared the hotel I saw Hull walking along slowly, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Why were you not at Mrs. Colton's?" I said, when I came beside him.

He looked at me with a comical smile. "A man can't dance attendance upon a woman forever without meaning anything," he said.

"I thought you did mean something," I returned.

"Well, I don't know whether I do or not, Dick, and I had better keep away until I find out. A man of my age doesn't go into this sort of thing with the impetuosity of youth. Who was at her house to-night?"

I told him about the dinner-party, and then we turned into the hotel and wrote letters until midnight.

The next morning, as I was crossing the Ponte Vecchio with Miss Benton, I saw Hull and Mrs. Colton in one of the little shops, looking at some jewellery. As they did not notice, so absorbed were they in the necklaces and bracelets that a crafty Florentine was baiting them with. When we had passed, I said, half to myself, "That looks dangerous."

"Oh, he will marry her," said Miss Benton. After this interchange of opinions we walked on in silence towards our destination—a certain little shop where fine mosaics were to be bought. It was a sort of museum, and was divided into two rooms by great pieces of really beautiful tapestry. In front were statuettes, china, furniture, old coins, and some pictures attributed to various dead-and-gone masters.

The shop proper was in the back, and Miss Benton and I went in there at once and began to look at the mosaics. Soon we heard voices that were very familiar.

"Here we can rest a while," said Mrs. Colton. "It is positively warm to-day in the sunshine. Buon' giorno, Signor Bianchi," she continued to the proprietor of the shop, in rather lame Italian. "We are not shopping to-day; only dropped in to rest and to look at your pretty things. Why, we have the place all to ourselves, for a wonder!"

But Hull did buy something or other: I suppose he felt that he ought to. His voice was so low and deep that we could not understand what he said, but Mrs. Colton's accents pierced the tapestry sharply. She talked at first about a picture on sale—a Wouaccenans it declared itself—and then, in response to what I supposed was Hull's question, she laughed, and said, "Ah! she is a dear, good soul, Mr. Hull, but utterly devoid of that plain common-sense which I know you admire so much in a woman. She looks severe and rigid, and I believe she is intensely religious—quite a bigot, in fact—but, in spite of all that, she is the most romantic and foolish of old maids. You ought to see her with Miss Ambler. It is forever, 'Take care, dear,' and, 'Don't forget your overshoes, love;' and once Miss Benton went to her room and cried her eyes out because Miss Ambler spoke angrily to her. It is very touching, such affection, but a wicked world will smile."

Then came a low murmur through the tapestry, and we knew that Hull had the floor. I looked at Miss Benton, who sat beside me at the little table

whereon a heap of mosaic jewellery was strewed, and I saw that an angry flush was on her cheeks, and a hard, determined look in her blue eyes.

“Shall we go?” I said.

She shook her head, and was about to speak, when a peal of laughter burst upon our ears. Mrs. Colton was vastly amused at something, and laughed heartily, but Hull did not join in her merriment, or, at any rate, he did not indulge himself in his customary Homeric ha-ha.

“Ah, that is the drollest idea!” gasped Mrs. Colton at last. “I have laughed until the tears are in my eyes. What would dear old Dick say if he had heard you?”

Now my face grew hot, and Miss Benton glanced at me with a smile of grim gratification.

“No, no; don’t be alarmed,” continued Mrs. Colton. “No hawk will ever invade that dovecote; no vile creature with a beard and a big voice will ever alarm those tender creatures. Neither Dick nor any other man could, by masculine wiles and artifices, separate those loving hearts. It makes me laugh to think of the soul-sisters with a sweetheart. He would have to turn polygamist, and carry them both to the poetic retreat of Salt Lake City.”

She laughed again, and, still laughing, left the shop. We heard the door close on her and her escort, and we looked at each other solemnly.

“Didn’t I tell you she was a viper?” said Miss Benton, in an odd, dry tone.

Luckily the little bric-à-brac den was one of the few places where English was not spoken, and consequently neither Signor Bianchi nor his polite clerk

had understood a word of the conversation we had partially overheard.

"Come, Mr. Logan, let us go," said Miss Benton, abruptly; and, after paying for the lace-pin I had chosen, I followed her out to the street. We walked on rapidly in utter silence for some distance, but Miss Benton finally said, "Do you know I hate that woman? That is," she made haste to add, "I should hate her if I allowed myself to hate any one."

"I'll hate her for both of us," I said. "Confound her condescension! Why, her father kept a corner grocery in Dover when my grandfather was in charge of St. Luke's there. I am not a snob, I hope; but when Julia Colton puts on such airs it exasperates me. What a tongue she has!"

"Richard," said Miss Benton, in her most solemn accents, "I fear you will think me prompted by a petty and revengeful spirit, but I want you to bring Mr. Hull to call on us to-morrow evening. I will prepare Mary to meet him. It will be a great sacrifice, but I think this is a matter that must be dealt with severely."

After that we went the rest of the way without any more words, I reflecting that verily awful is a woman who has heard herself ridiculed.

When I returned to the hotel, I went straight up to Hull's room, where I found him writing letters.

"So you have decided to marry Mrs. Colton?" said I, dropping into an arm-chair. "I saw you with her this morning, and, after what you said last night, I came to the conclusion that you had made up your mind to meet your fate like a man."

He frowned, and fingered his pen-holder nervously. "Don't draw your conclusions so rapidly," he said. "The fact is, I met Mrs. Colton at Maquay & Hooker's, and she—well, she sort of carried me off. We went from Dan to Beersheba."

He did not look at me, but an expression of droll resignation drifted over his face.

"Meanwhile, I dare say, you have forgotten all about Mary Ambler, of Baltimore," I remarked, in tones as nonchalant as I could make them.

He glanced up quickly, and dropped the pen-holder. "No, I haven't," he exclaimed.

"Well, she is here in Florence, living with Miss Benton. I dare say Mrs. Colton has told you about the soul-sisters, and made a very piquant and amusing story out of them. But the fact is, they are charming women, only Mrs. Colton has a grudge against them."

"Yes, I thought so myself," said Hull. "She was talking about them this morning, and I discovered a little venom. But I can't imagine Mary Ambler one of the soul-sisters."

"You can't?" I exclaimed. "Perhaps you can't imagine Mrs. Colton a trapper; but that is what everybody calls her, because she is trying to trap a title, or wealth. I would rather be called a soul-sister than a trapper, by George!"

Hull looked at me with wonder. "Dick, I have not seen you so excited in ten years," he said. "You take a great interest in these two ladies."

"Yes, I do," I replied. "They are good women; and if one of them had a child she would not shut it up in a convent a hundred miles away."

"Who has shut up a child in a convent?" Hull asked, beginning to laugh.

"Madam Colton. Oh, you needn't shake your head; I dare say she told you it was a small family boarding-school; but ask Mrs. Fairfax: she has two daughters in the same convent. You had better send Jennie and Nellie there."

"Good God! no!" cried Hull, fervently. "A convent is well enough for Catholics—although I don't see how a mother could send her children away from her—but it is no place for my daughters. Now, if I had been born a Romanist instead of a Presbyterian—"

"You might be a cardinal instead of mayor of Rochester," I said, beginning to laugh too. "However, to return to Mary Ambler: do you want to see months in, or don't you?"

her husb," he said, curtly.

still there very well, then; to-morrow evening we will call andere. Miss Benton sends you the invitation."

"Does she look—old?" Hull asked, hesitatingly. "Is she—gray? Why didn't she get married?"

"She doesn't look old, and she is not gray," I replied; "but you ought to know why she has never married. I suppose women don't get over their unhappy love-affairs as easily as men do."

His face flushed. "But she jilted me," he said. "That is, she broke the engagement. I suppose I didn't behave right though," he added, thoughtfully.

"Oh, she has probably forgiven you and forgotten you by this time. She is certainly a happy woman, if I ever knew one," I said.

as I entered, a natty little soldier tried hard to disappear in a pantry not big enough to hold the most diminutive of men. I shook my finger at Assunta, but the force of this mute reproach was broken by a smile that I could not repress. Again I prowled about the dark corridor, but at last entered the parlor. Hull's chair was drawn up close to Miss Ambler's, and he undoubtedly dropped her hand when I appeared. I knew that he hated me, but what could I do? Presently Miss Benton returned, grimmer than ever, and in a half-hour Hull and I took our leave. When we reached the walk he shook my hand with effusion.

"Dick," said he, "why didn't you take me there before?"

So the comedy ended. In the course of six months Mary Ambler went back to Rochester with her husband. Mrs. Colton is still in Florence, and still the trapper. The lonely soul-sister is there too, and is unwearied in her efforts to convert Italy. And Assunta has run off with the soldier.

ANNINA.

PASTOR CRESPI was a Waldensian clergyman whose acquaintance I made at a prayer-meeting in Venice. There are prayer-meetings in Venice, and the Italians relate their experiences and sing hymns with all the fervor of enthusiastic Methodists. My friend Miss Leslie called for me one evening, and I accompanied her because I thought it rather novel to glide to a prayer-meeting in a gondola. We went some distance, twisting through narrow canals, turning innumerable corners, shooting a score of bridges, while the soft moonlight beamed as brightly as it did on the night when Jessica escaped from Shylock's house. We halted at last before a great, grim palace, and a tall man hastened forward to help us up the slippery steps. This was Pastor Crespi, a singularly handsome man, with a silky beard and mustache covering the lower part of his face. He led the way up a wide marble staircase to a large room, where thirty or forty men and women were assembled. Some were devout souls; some, like me, had been brought by a friend; and a few were there out of sheer curiosity. One peasant entered, looked about him with a puzzled air, and asked what was going on. The reply made him cross himself and hasten away, shaking the unholy dust from his feet.

The room had been, in days gone by, a banquet-

hall, and the ceiling showed rosy nymphs and bacchantes, now very dingy and badly defaced. As an offset to these pagan pictures, one side of the hall was covered with Scripture texts, and where a Catholic would have looked to find a basin of holy water was a table full of tracts. In a corner stood a parlor organ, a young lady seated on the stool before it, intently studying a hymn-book. Thither Pastor Crespi led us, and introduced us to his niece, Signorina Annina Crespi. She was not more than seventeen—a pretty, slim, dark-haired slip of a girl, who looked very demure, but her black eyes were bubbling over with life and fun. She had in her hands a copy of Sankey's hymns, an Italian version. The prayer-meeting began with "Hold the Fort," Signorina Annina playing the organ and joining in the singing. Overhead, the nymphs still smiled sweetly, and the bacchantes never dropped their wreaths; but two or three gondoliers went out of the hall, knocking a few benches over to show their disapproval. Pastor Crespi made a fervid address; a white-headed man in the audience rose, and described his conversion; and finally there came an exhortation from a young man, who appeared to be not more than twenty. His eloquence was tremendous. Signorina Annina's great eyes dilated, and Miss Leslie cried, but the crowd went crazy. Everybody wanted to speak at once when the young man sat down, and the air was rent with passionate voices that Pastor Crespi tried in vain to quell. When order was restored we went home; but we had first been invited by the clergyman to dine with him and his niece on the following evening.

Thus began my acquaintance with the Crespis, and that winter I boarded with them in Florence, whither the pastor had been sent to take charge of a Protestant chapel. He had a charming wife, but no children, and Annina passed the winter with them in order that she might study music. Her home was in Turin, and I asked her, one day, at the dinner-table, if there were no good music teachers there.

She smiled significantly, and her uncle shook his finger at her. "Yes, there are music-teachers there," he said, "and there is also a young man there, and he distracts Annina's mind; so she must stay here in Florence, if she will learn anything."

Annina very soon told me that she was engaged to be married, and in a week I knew all about Allesio Ghiandaja. I heard of his blue eyes, his curly hair, his beautiful white hands, and his sweet tenor voice. Annina showed me his portrait, which she wore in a locket, and I pleased her by saying that he must be very handsome.

"An Apollo!" she exclaimed.

She wrote many letters to him, and received many in return, and as a favor she would occasionally show me a line or two. We became excellent friends, despite the disparity of our ages, and I often took her with me to walk, or to visit the galleries. She talked continually about her Allesio; but she spoke in Italian, so it was good practice for me in that language. He was a neighbor's son, and she had known him from babyhood.

"But we did not love," she said, "until one summer when his family and mine went to Switzerland together. Then we found out."

"Did he tell you?" I asked.

She looked much scandalized. "He told my mother," she answered, "and my mother told me; but I knew it before," she added, naively. "There is much in a glance."

The rogue shot a demure sidelong look at me as she said this, and gave an ecstatic little skip. We were walking in the cascade, and the officers bestowed bold stares of admiration on Annina. She was very pretty, and by no means unconscious of it; but she talked of her beauty in the same frank way that she did of her love-affair.

"Were you ever alone with Allesio—I mean after you became engaged?" I asked, wondering whether old customs still held sway.

"No, no!" she cried. "That my mother would never allow."

I felt her hand tighten on my arm, and she suddenly became silent. She did not even grow gay at the sight of Mr. Livingstone driving his sixteen or eighteen horses. At dinner she spoke hardly a word, and her uncle rallied her on her melancholy, her unwonted silence. "No letter from Allesio?" he said; for when no letter came, Annina usually wept copiously.

"Oh, she had a ream of paper this morning," his wife answered, a trifle impatiently. She was a plain matter-of-fact woman, and she thought Annina a silly, romantic girl, whose enthusiasm should be crushed. She told me privately that she had a very poor opinion of Allesio Ghiandaja.

"My brother-in-law would do better to arrange a marriage for Annina with his partner Signor Benel-

li," she said. "He is a prudent, middle-aged man, and would make an excellent husband."

"But if she loves Allesio?" I asked; for although I was forty-seven, I was sentimental.

Signora Crespi shrugged her handsome shoulders. "Annina's love doesn't count for much," she replied. "She would love a broomstick."

I did not agree with her. Annina was a child of an ardent, passionate temperament. She could love, and she loved Allesio.

Late that night she came to my bedroom, dressed in a flowing white wrapper and a pair of scarlet slippers, her long black hair floating about her shoulders. If she had sung the mad-song from Lucia I should not have been particularly surprised; but I was surprised, not to say horrified, when she flung herself on her knees before me and burst out crying. I finally succeeded in comforting her, and she raised her dishevelled head. "Oh," she moaned, "you will think me so wicked! I lied to you. I did see Allesio alone once. It was in the garden, and by moonlight. You will never tell? Promise me never to tell."

I promised solemnly. I had heard of lovers in a moonlight garden before, and I mentioned the fact now.

"But in America!" she exclaimed, as though anything were possible there. "I was so frightened that evening!" She shuddered at the recollection. "I only stayed ten minutes, and I was trembling all the time; for if my mother had discovered us she—oh, I can't think what she would have done!"

I saw him at Christmas-time, this Signor Ghianda-

ja, for he came with his future mother-in-law to pay a visit. They arrived late one evening, and the mother entered first. Allesio had stopped below to pay the cabman, she said; but in a minute he walked into the drawing-room, where we were all assembled. He greeted Pastor Crespi and his wife, he was introduced to me, and finally he approached Annina with both hands out-stretched. She came forward slowly, her head hanging and a hot flush dyeing her cheeks; she put her hands in his, and looked up at him shyly. He glanced over his shoulder at the mother, a plump, consequential little woman. "With your permission," he said; then without waiting for it, he stooped and kissed Annina. For a moment she stood bewildered. Her mother began to laugh, and Annina covered her face with her hands and ran away, while Allesio twirled his mustache and looked very handsome. I admire audacity in a man, and I admired him, although there was a gleam in his eyes that made me distrust him. He divined that I was *simpatica*, and during his visit he poured out his heart to me, as Annina had poured out hers. I took these lovers under my wing: I carried them off on walks and drives, never neglecting an opportunity to turn my back on them, and acting deaf and blind to their whispers and glances. In return, these lovers declared an undying affection for me.

"You must come and see us when we are married," Allesio said. "There shall be a room apart for you; and you must stay weeks—a whole winter. Annina *mia* and I will try to prove that we are not ungrateful. We shall never forget you, eh, Annina?"

She shook her head, and slipped her hand in mine by way of reply. She never chattered in his hearing; she became shy and silent in his presence, hardly daring to raise her eyes; but when she did raise them, it was to bestow an eloquent glance on her lover. At table she sat beside him, and she blushed when he filled her wineglass, blushed again when he passed her the bread. Alone with me, however, she rattled away as though to make up for lost time.

Once I asked her who Signor Benelli was, and she looked at me in surprise.

"Papa's partner," she replied.

"Do you like him, Annina?"

"*Così, così.* He is not young; he is fat, he is bald, but he is very amiable."

Clearly the thought of him as a suitor had never entered her head, and I concluded that Signora Crespi had mentioned him only to contrast him with Allesio. I rather fell in love with the young man too. He was always the same, serene and smiling; perhaps a trifle arrogant, a trifle vain, but courteous and considerate. Annina's mother I disliked, for she seemed a purse-proud dame, and I know that she told Signora Crespi that I ought to pay more for my board. Annina stood in awe of her, and her mother corrected her continually. It was, "Sit up, Annina;" or, "Turn out your toes, Annina;" or, "Take care what you say, Annina." I was glad when the tiresome woman went, but I missed Allesio's bright smile and melodious voice, and Annina was sad-eyed for a week. She wrote more letters than ever, and received more; meanwhile the spring came up our way. Annina grew very religious: she

went to prayer-meetings with her uncle, she attended service three times on Sunday, and she visited the poor with her aunt. She became interested in a Protestant charity-school; so she taught ragamuffins the Testament twice a week. The ragamuffins' fathers and mothers, ignorant folk, and inflamed by the priests, Pastor Crespi declared, did not like to see their children taught, and they stoned the school-room one day. Annina came home a martyr, with her right wrist sprained; so I wrote letters for her to Allesio. In them she described minutely all that she did and thought; nothing was too trivial, and I was sceptical enough to wonder if any man lived in this workaday world who could read one of those ten-page letters through, every morning for a year. But a man in love performs extraordinary feats—there is no doubt of that.

Suddenly Allesio's letters stopped. The days went by, and it was almost a week since Annina had heard from him. She ate nothing, she refused to go out, and she locked herself in her room to weep and be miserable. Her uncle and aunt and I met in conclave one evening, for we feared she would make herself ill.

"She was very feverish last night," declared Pastor Crespi, who loved his niece, albeit he teased her unmercifully.

"She has eaten almost nothing for a week," said his wife.

"She will die if he deserts her," added I, the sentimental spinster.

Then we three grown-up people smiled, but we all felt downright sorry for the poor girl. The

following morning we called in a physician, who looked very grave.

"She must be cajoled," he said. "If she will not eat, and will not go out, and will only cry, she will surely get the fever. There is a good deal of fever this spring."

What were we to do? We cajoled, we commanded, we implored; but Annina refused to eat more than the least morsel of bread, or to drink anything but a little water. A girl might keep that up for two days—I mean a girl who was shamming—but Annina kept it up for nearly two weeks. At last a letter came from Allesio—a short letter, written in a wavering hand and dated at Paris. He wrote that he was ill and among strangers, but that he was slowly getting better. Annina was eager to go to him by the first train—she even tried to run away; so we all watched her like cats until Allesio was well and back in Turin. As his letters grew regular, she regained her appetite, and was soon her joyous self once more.

It was my plan to join Miss Leslie in Venice that spring, but before I left Florence I bought a wedding present for Annina, which I confided to Pastor Crespi's care. She besought me to come to her wedding, which was to take place in September, and sobbed when I told her that in September I hoped to return to America.

"You will be in Europe again?" she said, lifting her tearful face from my shoulder.

"Yes, I shall come to Europe again," I replied.

"Then you must surely pay Allesio and me a long visit." She put her mouth close to my ear. "I

shall be his wife," she whispered. "I shall be Annina Ghiandaja."

"The cab is here!" cried Pastor Crespi, and I tore myself free from Annina's clinging arms.

She wrote me several letters that summer. She seemed very happy, for she was travelling with her parents, and Allesio was with them for a while. In September, as I was speeding towards London, an elderly gentleman in the railway-carriage saw that I was reading Italian, and addressed me in that tongue. He was very polite to me, in a benign way, and told me that he lived in Turin; so I asked him if he knew Giovanni Crespi, the silk merchant.

"Yes, indeed I do," he replied; "I know him and his family very well. Are you acquainted with them?"

"With the signora and with Annina," I said.

"Ah, Annina," he repeated. "I trotted her on my knee the other day, and now she is engaged to be married."

"To Allesio Ghiandaja," I added.

"He is not worthy of her," said the gentleman. "He drinks and he gambles. He went to Paris last spring, and returned half dead from the effects of dissipation. I hope Crespi will break off the match. Little Annina deserves a better husband."

Just before the steamer sailed from Liverpool I received a letter from Annina. She wrote in the gayest of spirits, although she told me that her marriage had been postponed.

"Dear Allesio must go to Lyons on business," she wrote, "but he will soon return. I have made him a little travelling cap of blue silk, and you cannot

think how well he looks in it. He says that he will not dare wear it, for all the girls will fall in love with him, and he will surely be carried off by somebody. 'And then,' he adds, 'what would you do, Annina *mia*?' Ah, what should I do?"

So she ran on for ten pages—Allesio, Allesio, always Allesio. I answered as soon as I reached New York, and in the next letter I expected to hear of Annina's marriage. As the weeks slipped by, I pictured the child on her wedding journey, too happy to write to me or to anybody else. The new year dawned, a clear, frosty day, the sky a dazzling blue, and the air full of powdery snow that blew off the house-tops. On such a day the sentimental traveller thinks of orange groves, of gray olive orchards, of the blue, tideless sea breaking on the Southern coast. It was on that day that I received my last letter from Annina; for although I had written to her several times, she had ignored me completely. After I read it, I brought out the letter that had reached me in Liverpool, and re-read that, hardly able to believe my own eyes. Some day I mean to go to Europe again, and I shall certainly look up Annina. I do not know what to think of her. The letter I received in Liverpool was written in August; the letter I received in New York was written four months later. The last letter I will translate as literally as possible, keeping the original punctuation. Such a neat letter! I wonder if she dashed it off at fever heat, or composed it carefully, biting the pen-holder with her white little teeth, and wrinkling her pretty brows! If I could answer this, I should think that I understood the mystery.

“PIAZZA D'AZEGLIO, TURIN. 4 December.

“DEAR MISS PENNIMAN,— Since last I wrote to you, so much has happened that my poor brain is in quite a whirl. I am the happiest of women, the wife of the best of men and mistress of the prettiest house in all Turin. Just think, a whole house! Mamma, who still lives in an apartment, envies me, I know. It is a great thing to be married. Everybody treats me with respect, even mamma, but I must except my cook, Lisetta, who used to be my nurse and who still considers me a child and scolds me. I was married in white silk (hand embroidered!), and my husband gave me pearls to wear. He is so good, so kind! I love him better every day, if that were possible. Dear uncle married us, and then went to Africa to rescue the heathen from their darkness. We all pray that he may succeed in his labors and that his health may hold good. Aunt Maria went with him. She wore her old gray silk at the wedding, and cried all the time. I never saw her cry before, but I suppose she was thinking of Africa.

“After the wedding, the journey! My husband let me plan the route. I could not decide, so he helped me, and we bought guide-books and maps, and finally we made up our minds to travel through our own country. I had never been farther south than Florence. We visited Genoa and Pisa, and finally went to Rome, and spent two delicious weeks there, visiting those monuments that history has rendered so familiar. We both caught cold, and my husband was ill for two days and I nursed him, glad to show my devotion and yet grieved that he should

suffer! He recovered entirely and we were able to proceed to Naples where we lingered in rapture before that beautiful bay so often described in prose and poetry. Then on to Pompeii! I thought of that terrible day when Vesuvius overwhelmed the smiling country and dealt death to men at their labor, women with their children in their arms. My husband bought me some Pompeiian ornaments for my drawing-room, but they were so ugly that I was not sorry when, on arriving home, I found that I had left them in the hotel at Naples.

“At last the journey was over and we returned to Turin. We are living in a lovely house in the Piazza d’Azeglio. It is beautifully furnished and I have the old cook, Lisetta; but I mean to send her away, for she still treats me like a child. In my own room I have put the lovely present you left for me, and I thank you for it a thousand times. You were so kind to me there in Florence. I often speak of you to my husband, who joins me in hoping that you will pay us a long visit very soon. He wants to do everything for me, and is the kindest, dearest of husbands.

“And now I must end my long letter with the hope that it finds you well and in good spirits. Think sometimes of me, and remember that I am the happiest woman in this great world that the good God has given to his unworthy servants.

“ANNINA BENELLI.

“P. S. It is not Allesio!”

AT THE MAISON DOBBE.

WHEN I turned from the sunlight of the Quai Masséna into the shadow of the narrow Rue Pierre-noire, I saw Alida come out of her shop and plant herself in the middle of the street. There she stood, arms akimbo, gazing intently at the china, the pictures, the bronzes imprisoned behind the great panes of plate-glass. Soon she glanced up to where a new gilt sign informed the passer-by that here was the Maison Dobbe; then she turned and saw me. She was a plump, dark-haired woman, with thick features and a swarthy skin. She was perhaps thirty-three or four years old, but she professed not to know her age.

"Miss Penniman!" she said, and a smile crept slowly to her face. "Here again. I am so glad to see you. I have just been arranging my windows. There is a Teniers," pointing to a dull daub in a heavy frame. "Cheap at three thousand francs," she added, mechanically.

Her shop did not look unlike many a fashionable drawing-room, full of cabinets, cupboards, bronzes, Dutch clocks, mirrors, and candlesticks. There were rugs on the floor, hangings and screens everywhere, and the walls were covered with small pictures in huge frames. Alida pushed forward an uncomfortable spindle-legged chair, and begged me to be seated.

"Adolphe," she said, gently, and a tall young fellow in a sort of green livery stepped out of a dusky corner. She commanded him to fetch a bottle of wine and some biscuit; then turning to me—"Are you already long here?" she asked.

"I came yesterday," I answered, "and I want to stay all winter if I can find a cheap, decent boarding-place. Mademoiselle Dobbe, I will teach you a new idiom: I am dead broke."

Alida smiled: "I know that idiom since a long time. But why do you not take rooms and have meals sent in? I live thus; so do many." She brushed invisible dust off her gown as she added, softly, "Up-stairs there are two rooms—if you did not mind the old furniture—and we could arrange about the meals."

Mind the old furniture! I enjoyed the idea, and that very night slept in a great carved bedstead, and the next morning made my toilet with the aid of a superb Venetian mirror. Alida's whole house was a shop, and she used her wares herself. Coffee and rolls were served in a dining-room where there were two sideboards and three tall clocks. The china was exquisite, and Adolphe watched over it tenderly, a wrinkle of anxiety puckering his forehead. He came in and washed the fragile cups and plates, but when the bell over the shop-door rang he dropped his dishcloth and hastened down-stairs.

"Do you call him a clerk, or an errand-boy, or a buttons?" I asked.

"All the three," was the answer, given in English, as usual. She spoke several languages in the same nonchalant way that she did English, and with a sub-

blime disregard of idioms. She succeeded in making herself understood, however.

Besides Adolphe, she had a maid, who also filled a nondescript position. She took care of the rooms, she sewed, she ran errands, and she tended shop. I tended shop, too, after a while; it was as catching as measles or mumps, and it was a very easy thing to do. When any one came in, I displayed the art treasures and chatted about the weather. The trifles had their prices marked on them, but the larger articles—the pictures, furniture, tapestry—were of fluctuating value, and no one tried to sell them in Alida's absence. A would-be purchaser was politely asked to call again, and in most cases the second call was made.

“It is not wise to be eager to sell,” said Alida; and this was her policy. She was slow, unenthusiastic, even when driving a close bargain. She acted as though it were a matter of supreme indifference to her whether she made a sale or not. At first I labored under the delusion that she was rather dull-pated, but I soon found out that there was a shrewd, calculating brain behind her sleepy eyes. How she came to engage in the bric-à-brac trade, how she acquired her knowledge of it, were mysteries I never could fathom. She bore an unblemished reputation, and was highly respected by the people who knew her best. She went to the English church with great regularity; she observed Sunday; but I am sceptical enough to think that she saw some advantage in thus yielding to English prejudices. I should consider Alida one of the most sensible and sagacious of women, were it not for the Edouard Braun

episode. A photograph of Edouard Braun stood on her dressing-table, and letters came from him frequently. I ventured to banter her about him a little, and she bore it with the same stolid good-humor that she did any scoffing remarks upon her old pictures and furniture. I could not live there without getting some knowledge of the bric-à-brac trade, and I did not scruple to say what I thought about it. The works of the old masters excited my derision most, and above all the dingy daub that declared itself a Teniers.

“It is a humbug, Alida,” I said, “and you know it.”

She smiled sweetly: “My dear friend, I cannot tell; but I know I shall sell it.” Whereupon she dropped it behind an old sofa. There was always some old master behind that sofa, and it was always discovered by some curiosity-seeker. I saw Alida put three or four pictures there at different times, and whenever one was discovered she always wore a look of mild amazement. Was it genuine? the lucky finder would ask. Ah, that was a question she could never answer, unfortunately. She had bought it as a speculation, or her agent had sent it to her, but she could not vouch for it. Then she would look so childishly stupid that it was impossible to consider her a connoisseur, and I myself was never able to discover whether or not she was a judge of bric-à-brac.

“Is this genuine?” I asked once when a new piece of tapestry came. “Is it genuine, Alida? or did your friends in Rotterdam make it for you?—the cousins, for instance, who make the cupboards, or the uncle who makes the old clocks? Is it genuine?”

"I think so; I do not know," she replied, in her helpless way. "How can I tell? Ah, miss, if I order an old clock to be made for me, then I know it is not genuine; but when I buy a ready-made old clock I cannot tell. Nobody can," she added, with a cynical smile.

She was likewise ignorant of her parentage. She was almost sure her father was Dutch, she fancied her mother was Russian.

"It makes no difference," she said. "They are dead—I know that—and buried."

Her idea of happiness was to eat and drink her fill, and then listen in dreamy silence to an endless round of operatic airs tinkled out of a large music-box. At such times Adolphe would steal in and place a cup of black coffee at her elbow—coffee that he had made himself, just as he knew she liked it.

"That good Adolphe!" she would murmur, so caressingly that a gleam of pleasure always lighted up the good Adolphe's broad, stolid countenance.

He puzzled me quite as much as his mistress did. He was not servile, although he washed the china; and he had a very independent air despite his half livery. I found myself wondering how old he might be, for he was one of those slim creatures with dusty blond hair and white eyebrows whose age is extremely difficult to guess. His skin was fresh and rosy, not a trace of beard was visible; but in his little gray eyes lurked an expression not altogether boyish. Alida treated him as though he were a lad of sixteen summers, and sometimes urged him to take a holiday—an offer which he always declined.

"He is too sedate for his years," she said. "It

is not natural that a boy should work as he does. Would you believe it?—he gets a lesson in English three evenings in the week.” And from this stray remark I surmised that Adolphe was more ambitious than he looked.

Life at the Maison Dobbe was growing rather humdrum, when we were all plunged into a state of great excitement by the appearance of Edouard Braun. His good looks did not propitiate me, and he took such pains to explain that he was Braun, not Brown, that I instantly made up my mind he was English, not German. My opinion was strengthened by his beautiful Cockney accent, which he declared was acquired during his long residence in London.

Alida, who believed no one, did believe him, and gravely told me that he was a rich man and a member of an excellent family in Vienna. Adolphe and I were sceptical, the maid sided with her mistress, and so the house of Dobbe was divided against itself.

One dismal afternoon I found Adolphe in the shop, poring over a tattered copy of one of Ouida’s romances, and looking out the words in the dictionary with a gravity and earnestness that struck me as truly comic. “Where is Mademoiselle Dobbe?” I asked, in English.

“Gone out with Monsieur Braun,” Adolphe answered, in the same language. He paused, looked at me, and added, sadly, “Damn that Braun!”

“Oh, you must not say that!” I exclaimed, with all a spinster’s horror of profanity.

“Is it not good English?” quoth Adolphe, in che-

rubic innocence. "It is in this book here," tapping the tattered romance.

I was forced to admit that it was idiomatic and correct enough in one sense; but when I explained my objection to the adjective, Adolphe glided off in a torrent of glib French apologies. "But, mademoiselle," he continued, "that Braun gambles at Monte Carlo. He was a valet, and was discharged because he stole from his master. One of my friends knows him; but, alas, I dare not say a word of this to Mademoiselle Dobbe." He looked ineffably miserable, and his lips quivered.

I was on the point of giving him a franc to assuage his childish grief, when two fussy, vulgar English women entered the shop, and in bad French asked the price of a beautiful brass sconce. It was one of the articles that only Alida herself sold, but instead of saying that the proprietor was out, and the customers must call again, Adolphe rubbed his dusty hair, and hesitatingly demanded a hundred francs.

I was horrified, for I knew the sconce to be worth only half that sum.

Adolphe seemed frightened, confused, perplexed, and acted like such a blockhead that one of the women remarked frankly in her native tongue that he was quite an idiot. Then the customer asked to see the proprietor, and Adolphe stammered out that the proprietor had gone to Belgium to bury her mother. The comedy ended with the sale of the sconce. No sooner had the women quitted the shop than Adolphe turned to me with a smile—such a smile!—as astute as a Roman augur's. I was glad I had not offered him a franc to assuage his grief.

When he told Alida of the bargain, she opened her sloe-black eyes. "One hundred francs!" she repeated.

Adolphe nodded. "And my commission?" he murmured, softly.

Alida gave him a tap on the shoulder and a piece of gold. Ever after she treated him with profound respect, and she said to me, "He is Swiss; he is clever."

Meanwhile Monsieur Braun came every day to the Maison Dobbe. He sang little songs to a guitar accompaniment, completely silencing the once favorite music-box. I think that he must at some time have figured in a music-hall, he knew such a string of tawdry ditties, and sang with such a melodramatic air.

Adolphe listened to him patiently, and in the intervals of the singing served Alida with the coffee she loved. If black coffee could have broken the spell, Monsieur Braun would have received his *cong  *; but the beverage was not so potent, and the sweethearts gallivanted gayly while Adolphe tended shop and studied Ouida's works.

"She will marry him," was the burden of his plaint.

"Why should you care?" I asked at last.

Adolphe stared. "But he will spend all her money, mademoiselle. It is shameful," he added, sadly, "how foolish women are."

This unflattering remark puzzled me. It was the utterance of no callow boy, and I looked searchingly at Adolphe's clean pink-and-white face. I detected tiny wrinkles around his eyes; I almost believed

there was a shimmer of gray over his thick, tow-colored hair. One morning early, unmistakable traces of a beard were visible. Altogether, I put Adolphe down as a man who for some occult reason chose to look as much like a boy as possible. My suspicions were deepened when I found him one day going through the pockets of Monsieur Braun's light tan-colored overcoat. He brought out a pair of gloves, smelled them, and put them back. A gaudy silk handkerchief underwent the same treatment, and then from the depths of an inner pocket he produced a letter.

As he was about to read it, I stepped forward. "Adolphe," said I, sternly.

He beckoned to me with a smile. "What a fool is a man who leaves his letters in his pockets!" he said, with a cunning expression. Then he calmly read the letter, made a few notes of its contents, and put the epistle back where he had found it.

It was nothing to me what he or Alida or Monsieur Braun chose to do, but I watched them all with lively interest. I was not a whit surprised when one fine day Adolphe said he was going to take a vacation. Alida begged him to stay, but he was inexorable, and accordingly off he went, no one knew whither. About a week later I was called to London on business, and I too was forced to bid adieu to the Maison Dobbe.

"You will never see the Maison Dobbe again," Alida said. "I am going to sell up—or is it down?"

"Out," I answered. "And *après*?"

"I am going to marry," quoth Alida, "and then farewell shop."

To leave was like breaking off in the middle of a three-volume novel; and all the way to Paris I wondered what the end would be. Arrived there, however, the first person I met at the station was Adolphe, accompanying a stout, complacent, middle-aged dame evidently of London extraction.

"Mees Penniman!" cried Adolphe as soon as he caught sight of me.

"Going back to Nice?" I said.

He nodded: "And that lady yonder is going with me. She is English, she is rich, she takes in lodgers, and I want to introduce her to Mademoiselle Dobbe." Adolphe passed his hand over his mouth, and smiled apologetically. "You see," he added, "she is Madame Edouard Braun." Then Adolphe's smile vanished. "But she says she has had enough of him; she says anybody is welcome to him. What do you suppose Mademoiselle Dobbe will do?"

I was too much scandalized to reply immediately, and before I could put my horror at the question into words the guard came along and swept Adolphe and Madame Braun off to a carriage. For my part, I never wished to see them again, or Alida Dobbe either, but I must confess that I was curious to know how Adolphe's question would be answered. It was a full year before I found out. I was in London that spring, and I met Alida in Regent Street. She was elegantly, not to say gaudily dressed in a straw-colored silk suit and a frivolous little lace bonnet. She leaned on the arm of a tall, slim man whose mustache and whiskers matched her dress perfectly in color. She simpered and bridled when she saw me, and promptly begged leave to present her hus-

band, Monsieur Weitlaufer. Monsieur lifted his hat, and murmured "charmed" or "delighted" in a voice that sounded very familiar. I looked up at him quickly.

"Yes," said Alida, with a slow, rapturous smile—"the good Adolphe."

WHITHER CURIOSITY LED.

It was a fine midwinter day. Overhead, in depths of vivid blue, the sun shone cruelly bright, and beat down on the waves of the Mediterranean until they glittered like snake-scales. Everybody in Nice had come to the Promenade des Anglais—the invalids to be wheeled slowly up and down in their chairs, the well people to meet friends and see the world. The military band in the public garden played ceaselessly, and the cosmopolitan loungers on the benches chatted as ceaselessly in every modern tongue. Venders of flowers, of guide-books, of photographs, of matches, of smoked glasses, hawked their wares, and a tall, copper-skinned fellow, dressed as a Turk, did his best to persuade the crowd that his pipes and cigar-holders were as excellent as his costume was picturesque.

Some distance up the promenade, and almost out of hearing of the band, there sat on one of the benches facing the sea a tall, thin, elderly man, with a large mustache, which was dyed a glossy blue-black and waxed at the ends. In his button-hole was a bunch of violets, and across his knees lay a light walking-stick. A small white poodle slept peacefully in a ball at his feet. This gentleman saluted none of the passers-by, but he scrutinized them all keenly, and now and then rose and looked earnestly down

the promenade. Sometimes he pulled out his watch, glanced at it, and returned it to his pocket with a sort of sigh. This he did so often that it attracted the attention of two young men who sat on the next bench, smoking cigarettes. One of them, a stout, rubicund gentleman of perhaps five-and-twenty, chuckled, and indicating the occupant of the next bench by a slight gesture, said, in an undertone, "That is the sixth time he has looked at his watch. Why do you suppose she keeps him waiting?"

"Coquetry," murmured his companion, drawing his hat down over his eyes to shield them from the sun.

"Well, why does she coquet with an old fellow like that? He is pale and thin, and I dare say he has the consumption, like everybody else here. Do you suppose he is rich—a Russian prince or a millionaire merchant?"

"Good heavens, Harry! what conundrums you ask?" returned the young man with his hat over his eyes. "If you take such an interest in Don Moustachio yonder, go ask him what his name is, where he comes from, what sort of hair-dye he uses, and whom he is waiting for. It won't be necessary for you to explain that you are Harry Gale, from Hartford: he will know that you are a Yankee."

While he was speaking, Don Moustachio drew his watch out of his pocket once again, looked at it steadily for a full minute, and then, with a melancholy, despondent air, walked down the promenade, the fat poodle waddling along at his heels.

"He gives her up," said Gale. "And so should I. He has been on that bench an hour; and I saw him planted there yesterday. Jack, I would really like

to see the siren. Is she young or old; lean or plump, blonde or brunette?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," Jack replied, lazily; "but I advise you to come here every day and watch for her. That would just suit you—you are so romantic. I should think you would realize how ridiculous it is for a fat fellow like you to be romantic."

"Hamlet was fat," Gale retorted, good-humoredly.

"Yes, Hamlet was fat," said Jack; "and he was crazy too; and sometimes I think you are. Witness the affair on the steamer, witness the affair in Paris, witness the affair on the express train to Nice, and now witness this insane curiosity about an old fellow with a dyed mustache. Do you propose to remain on this bench for the next twenty-four hours to see if the siren comes after Don Moustachio? You would if I were not here. Oh, you *are* romantic."

He rose, and from his height of six-feet-two gazed down quizzically at Gale, who crossed his legs and smoked with imperturbable tranquillity. At last, however, he rose too.

"Forge ahead, Jack," he said. "We will go back to the hotel if you like, although I am not in the least afraid of the sunset, which the people here seem to think ushers in a legion of devils. It is all humbug. Besides, I should like to stay and see the light fade out of the sea."

"Light fade out of the sea!" Jack exclaimed. "Let's talk of something rational. What shall we have for dinner? Did you think the bisque last night was very good?"

He thereupon began to elaborate a *menu* with such care that he had only arrived at the *entrées*

when the public garden was reached. It was almost deserted now. The band had gone away, and so had the invalids, and the crowd about the pavilion was dispersing rapidly in all directions. Already the twilight was drifting over the scene, bringing with it a breath of raw air. It was as though the curtain had been dropped and the lights put out. The two young men quickened their steps and struck into a long, swinging gait that soon brought them to the Hôtel Chauvain. A superb functionary in livery met them at the door, and looked first at them and then at the letter he held. "Which, please, is Mr. John Russel?" he said, in careful English.

The tall man stretched out his hand and took the letter without a word. After glancing at the address, he said, lazily, "Yes, it is worth a tip," and thereupon dropped a coin in the superb functionary's ever-ready palm.

"It is from the Langdons," he continued, turning to Gale. "They have a villa at San Remo; item, a pretty daughter; item, a large fortune. I was asked to spend a week there, and I suppose this letter is the formal backing up of the informal invitation." As he spoke he tore open the missive, and now he glanced over it rapidly. "Yes," said he, with evident satisfaction, "it is just as I supposed. Well, I shall accept; and as they wish me to come at once, I will send them a despatch to-night, and to-morrow morning bid adieu to Nice."

"And to me," said Gale, somewhat ruefully.

"Only for a week," Russel rejoined. "You can pick me up at San Remo, or I will meet you at Genoa and then go on to Rome as we proposed. The

week that I am at San Remo you can spend in cultivating the acquaintance of the interesting gentleman with the dyed mustache. A happy thought occurs to me. Perhaps you can supplant him in the affections of the mysterious siren." Russel twisted the end of his pointed beard and looked wickedly at Gale. "You are always hungry for adventure, you know," he added.

"I know I am hungry for my dinner now," Gale rejoined. "What did you say we were going to have to eat? Thank Heaven! for a week I can make my own bill of fare."

The early morning train carried Russel off to San Remo, and Gale was left alone in Nice. In the great crowd of Americans that overran the hotels, the streets, the shops, he knew not a soul, and he wandered about on the morning of Russel's departure, feeling rather lonesome, and finally went into the Hammam and indulged himself in the luxury of a Turkish bath. In the afternoon he of course went with all the world to the Promenade des Anglais. After listening a while to the music, and watching a flirtation between a white-capped *bonne* and a natty little French soldier, he went off to see if Don Moustachio was at his post. He found him seated on the same bench, a fresh bouquet of violets in his button-hole, and the fat poodle asleep at his feet. Gale lighted a cigar, and seating himself on the next bench, made a pretence of reading a week-old *Figaro*. Don Moustachio did not appear to see him. He sat with his hands resting on his walking-stick, and his eyes fixed upon the expanse of blue water that to-day shone like steel. When people passed

he glanced at them keenly, without, however, lifting his head, and, as before, he drew his watch out of his pocket now and then and gazed upon it with a reproachful expression. At four o'clock precisely he rose and walked away, and Gale, after a minute's deliberation, followed him at a discreet distance. Don Moustachio went down the Promenade, through the public garden, crossed the Rue Masséna, and turned up a narrow street lined with miscellaneous little shops. One of the most ambitious of these shops he entered. Over the door was a sign bearing the name "Brenta," and in the window was a show of photographs, stationery, carved woods, and knick-knacks generally. Although Gale promptly entered the shop too, he found its only occupant to be a plump, rosy woman, ensconced in an easy-chair behind the counter and sewing industriously. She came forward with a smile, and said, in very English English, "What can I show you, sir?"

"Note-paper," Gale replied, laconically, wondering whether the gentleman with the dyed mustache had hidden under the counter.

The plump woman gave him a big book of samples to choose from, and while he was turning the pages, she chatted gayly about the weather, the number of visitors at Nice, the new company at the theatre, and the man who had tried to kill himself the day before at Monte Carlo.

Gale leaned over the counter and chatted too, until he finally became aware of the fact that he had spent nearly half an hour in the shop. "I'll take a quire of this," he said, hastily indicating some note-paper of bright green tint.

Madame Brenta—she had told him that she was the proprietor of the shop—wrapped up his purchase neatly, and, hoping that the next time he needed anything in her line he would call, bade him a polite good-afternoon.

“But meanwhile where the deuce is Don Moustachio?” said Gale to himself when he struck the sidewalk. Surely he went into the shop, and as surely he was not there when Gale entered.

The next afternoon, however, he was at his post on the Promenade, the bunch of violets in his button-hole, and the poodle asleep at his feet. He was evidently conscious that the blond, rubicund occupant of the next bench had a familiar face, and he and Gale exchanged a formal salutation. Gale read his paper as before until he mustered up courage to address Don Moustachio and ask the hour. “My watch has run down,” he added, apologetically.

“It is now exactly twenty-three minutes of four,” the elder gentleman replied, courteously, and in English that had a queer foreign accent, neither French, German, nor Italian. “I never let my watch run down,” he continued: “it is a careless habit into which I have never allowed myself to fall.”

The poodle looked up sleepily and wagged his tail.

“His name is ‘Fall,’” said Don Moustachio, “and he thinks I spoke to him. He is very sagacious. Go to sleep, Fall.” And then he repeated the command in a language that was certainly not German, although it sounded rather like it.

“Not sagacious enough, though, to understand English,” said Gale, with his ever-ready smile.

"No; I always speak Dutch to him. I am Dutch by birth. I came from Rotterdam, but I have lived here some time."

"You speak English well," Gale hazarded.

"Ten of the years of my youth were spent in London," was the reply, "and my sister-in-law, whom I see much of, is English, so I keep in constant practice. Monsieur is an American, unless I mistake?"

"Yes," Gale said, feeling a trifle mortified, "I am an American. Is my accent very nasal?" he added.

"Not very; but still it is not English, monsieur. Myself, I prefer the American accent: it is much more distinct and easily understood. Also, I prefer the Americans."

Gale lifted his hat for his countrymen, and said, "Thank you," then resumed the reading of his paper, while Don Moustachio took up his former attitude of patient expectancy.

An old gentleman wrapped in furs passed by, leaning heavily on the arm of a smug-faced servant; then came a man and his wife, evidently plain Americans from some interior town, who gazed about them with forlorn interest; and following them was a bevy of merry English girls, with a distracted governess in tow.

Suddenly Don Moustachio rose and looked earnestly down the Promenade. Gale naturally peered over the top of his paper, and saw that the cause of his neighbor's excitement was a lone female advancing rapidly, her face quite hidden by a neat umbrella, with which she kept off the reflection of the sun on the sea. As she drew near, Don Moustachio

smoothed his gloved hands nervously, and Gale was so interested that he forgot his paper and stared openly. Was this, then, the siren, this plump, trim person clad all in black and clasping a large prayer-book? The prayer-book served to remind Gale that it was Sunday—a fact he had totally forgotten. She held her umbrella in such a way that her face was not visible until she arrived quite opposite the two men, and then was revealed a rosy English countenance, whereon unswerving respectability and decorum were stamped. She passed on without lifting her eyes, and Don Monstachio sank back on the bench again. He glanced towards Gale, and catching sight of that young man's curious gaze, smiled a little and reddened. Then he frowned, looked at his watch sternly, and walked away, the faithful and sagacious poodle at his heels. Gale did not dare follow him, although his curiosity was now at fever-heat, and he burned to know whether Don Moustachio would again vanish in Madame Brenta's shop. Possibly he was that lady's husband. Possibly that lady had another man for a husband and the Dutch gallant for a lover. It was the South of France, and anything was possible.

Gale reached the rendezvous on the Promenade early the next day, and found Don Moustachio's bench empty. Presently, however, that gentleman appeared, walking slowly, not as though he wished to saunter along and enjoy the fine weather, but as though it was something of an effort to put one foot before the other. Far from being annoyed at Gale's presence, he greeted him almost cordially, and remarked that it was a fine day.

"Yes, a fine day," Gale rejoined. "But all the days are fine here, it seems to me."

"Too fine; too glaring," said Don Moustachio, discontentedly. "I get tired of the everlasting sunshine, and I long for a gray day, such as one enjoys in Holland and England. Ah, what a relief a dark, rainy day would be!"

"But we couldn't come here in the rain," Gale said; "and I prefer sitting out-of-doors in the sunshine, to staying in the house and listening to the rain-drops."

"You seem very fond of the Promenade," said Don Moustachio, "and especially fond of this particular part of it. Perhaps there is a reason for it." And Don Moustachio smiled in a mischievous, meaning way, and then slowly shut one eye and looked at Gale out of the other with an air of ineffable wisdom. Gale's red face grew redder yet. Did the gentleman from Rotterdam suspect anything? Was he conscious of being an object of Yankee curiosity? Were duels fashionable in Holland?

"Yes," said Gale, frankly; "I confess I have a reason for coming here so regularly."

The elder man twisted up the ends of his dyed mustache and assumed a jaunty air. "A singular coincidence," he said, with a very brotherly smile. "I too have a reason for coming here so regularly."

"So?" said Gale. He strangled an incipient laugh, and picked up his newspaper. His neighbor fancied that he, also, was waiting for a siren.

Fortune favors the audacious. To Gale's intense amazement, before a half-hour had elapsed he spied Miss Kate Brigham, of Chicago, tripping gayly down

the Promenade, quite alone, and looking, in her French costume, as pretty as ever a pretty American girl could. Of course he rose and met her.

"Well, I didn't expect to see you," she said, tendering him her hand.

"And I certainly did not expect to see you," he rejoined, strolling along beside her. "What are you doing here?"

"Having a good time, of course. I am with the Mores, and we are at the Hôtel des Anglais: we always go to the hotel that stands first in Baedeker. You must come and see us."

"Oh, I will," said Gale, "although I haven't the pleasure of knowing the Mores. But how do you happen to be out here on the Promenade all by yourself?"

"I'm taking a constitutional, that's all. Jennie More has a headache, and Mrs. More never exercises; so I had to come alone. Besides, I like to see the crowd. It's pretty gay here—gayer than Paris, it seems, for in Paris the gayety is spread out, and here it is all in a bunch. We went to Monte Carlo yesterday. You have been to Monte Carlo, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have been to Monte Carlo, and came away a hundred francs richer than I went."

"Oh, you ought not to gamble. Don't tell; but I made fifty francs there, and then I lost them, and ten francs more trying to get them back. Sixty francs!"

"Call it twelve dollars," said Gale. "It doesn't sound so awful. Reckon your earnings in francs and your losses in dollars. Halloo! Who is the old

gentleman in the carriage? He is certainly beckoning to you, or else he is a raving maniac?"

"Why, it is Mr. More!" cried Miss Brigham. "Of course he wants me to drive with him, and I suppose I must go; but I would a good deal rather walk up and down the Promenade with you. Don't fail to come and see us."

With this she tripped up to the carriage and took her place beside white-haired Mr. More, who smiled at her benignly.

Gale walked back to Don Moustachio, whom he found in a most playful frame of mind.

"Ah, you rogue," he cried, shaking his cane gayly, "you acted the little comedy so well! you were so surprised, and she was so surprised! It was beautiful."

"I dare say it was," Gale returned, rather dryly, and glancing at his watch. "Past four o'clock," he added.

Don Moustachio's playfulness vanished. "Then I shall go home," he said, heaving a sigh. "But allow me." And now he produced a card from his pocket and presented it to Gale with a bow. On the card was neatly engraved the name Rudolph Brenta.

Gale immediately returned the compliment by presenting his card, and then the two men walked down the Promenade together.

"Will you not come and take a glass of wine with me?" said the American, true to the habits of his native land.

"With pleasure," responded Monsieur Brenta; and presently they entered a *café*, and Gale ordered

a bottle of the Burgundy which was put down at the highest figure on the wine-card. The Burgundy warmed the cockles of Monsieur Brenta's heart, and loosened his never very stiff tongue.

"Ah!" he said at last, with a melancholy shake of the head, "I envied you when I saw you going down the Promenade, so happy, and smiling at her so tenderly."

"Your turn will come," Gale rejoined, in soothing accents.

"I fear she is ill," Monsieur Brenta said. He leaned his head on his hand and gazed down at a spot of wine on the table. "She has not come to the rendezvous now for several days, and she used to be there so often. Perhaps, though, the children have kept her. She is an English governess in a family here, and her time is not at her own disposal. It seems long since I have seen her, although, of course, it cannot be a week." He drained his wineglass with sad satisfaction. "I fear she is ill," he repeated.

"Why not go and find out, or write?" said Gale, with American directness.

"Oh, that would never do!" Monsieur Brenta exclaimed. "The family in which she lives is very severe: the father looks over the letters with the eye of a—a watch-mender. But they treat her kindly, and I must not cause her to lose her position. Unluckily, I cannot marry just now—money-difficulties, you know; but they will come out all right. *Pa-zienza*, as the Italians say."

Gale instantly came to the conclusion that his new acquaintance was a Monte-Carlo man, and was wait-

ing until a lucky turn at the roulette-table should relieve him of his difficulties. He wondered whether the English governess had any notion of the nature of her sweetheart's mode of life. And was she an English governess?

"I am stopping with my sister-in-law, Madame Brenta," monsieur continued. "She, too, is an Englishwoman; but, bah! not like mine. She is too fat, you know," and he screwed up his face in scorn, "and too prosaic. However, she is clever: she makes money. All the English residents know her, and come to her when they want anything. That's partly because she goes to church on Sundays. But she treats me well; I can find no fault with my sister-in-law, although I confess I shall be glad when I can return to Holland."

"You did not come here for your health, then?" said Gale, noting monsieur's sunken cheeks.

"My health? No, indeed: we are all thin in my family, but we have constitutions like oxen. I came because there is a man here who owes me some money. I am putting the law on him—turning the screws. And he squeals. I learned that phrase from an American—a South-American. His name was De la Vergne, and he came from New Orleans. But I must not stay here any longer, for I promised my little nephew I would take him to the house of one of his friends. There is to be a party, I believe. I wish you good-afternoon, Mr. Gale, and I hope to see you to-morrow."

That evening Gale went to Monte Carlo; but although he stayed until the midnight train, not a glimpse did he have of Monsieur Brenta. Perhaps,

after all, he was not a gambler; perhaps his money-difficulties were not connected with a roulette-table. Poor old fellow! there was something honest and unaffected about him, in spite of his blue-black mustache. Such were Gale's reflections as he doffed his clothes that night and slipped into bed.

He went to the rendezvous the next afternoon, feeling as anxious as though he expected to meet a true-love himself. But Monsieur Brenta did not appear. On the bench he usually occupied sat a flashy dame, dressed out in blue and gold, and holding a gaudy parasol over the smallest of small bonnets. And the next afternoon Brenta again did not appear. Gale waited for him until past four o'clock, and then made his way to the little shop where he had bought the green note-paper, and there he found Madame Brenta, suave and smiling as usual.

"I have had the pleasure of making Monsieur Rudolph Brenta's acquaintance," Gale said, taking off his hat, "and I had a sort of engagement with him yesterday, but he failed to keep it. As he did not come to-day either, I feared that he might be ill."

"He has taken a cold," Madame Brenta replied, "and I persuaded him to stay in the house. He was speaking of you this morning, and I know he would be glad to see you. Won't you walk into the parlor?"

"With pleasure," said Gale; and then he followed her into a good-sized room at the back of the shop. There sat Monsieur Brenta, a huge white silk handkerchief round his neck, playing checkers with a little boy. He rose at Gale's entrance, and held out his hand with evident pleasure.

“Ah, this is kind of you,” he cried. “It wasn’t difficult to find out where I lived, was it? I fancy everybody in Nice knows the Brentas. You see, I am condemned to remain in the house; but I am not in the least ill.”

Then he addressed a few words in Dutch to the little boy, who straightway left the room.

“My nephew understands some English — too much in fact. I wanted to ask you if you were on the Promenade—you know where—and if anybody came as though looking for somebody else. Understand?”

“Yes, I understand,” said Gale; “and I was there, but nobody came.”

Monsieur Brenta now detached a large locket from his watch-chain, and opening it, handed it to Gale without a word. He looked at the miniature earnestly. It represented a blooming English face, but by no means a weak, sentimental one, and he wondered how a woman who looked like that, so strong and self-reliant, could make a rendezvous on the Promenade des Anglais with an elderly man who dyed his mustache. He was, however, wise enough not to attempt to solve the problem of affinities, and he handed back the miniature, saying,

“A sweet face, Monsieur Brenta.”

“It is more than that, Mr. Gale,” he replied, gravely: “it is a good face, and worth a thousand weak, pretty, insincere countenances.”

Gale’s respect for his host grew stronger on the spot. Perhaps he was a little garrulous, and there was no doubt about the mustache being dyed; but he was neither a fool nor a knave, and for the first

time Gale felt ashamed of his curiosity and of himself. Mentally, he determined that he would never tell John Russel about Don Moustachio and the English governess.

He stayed there some time, chatting upon one topic and another, and he made the discovery that Monsieur Brenta was a man of more than ordinary intelligence. He had read a good deal, and was very well informed upon all the questions of the day. Finally, however, Gale rose to take his leave.

"*Au revoir*," said Monsieur Brenta, "until tomorrow on the Promenade."

In the shop Madame Brenta stopped him. "Does Monsieur Brenta seem at all worried about his health?" she asked. "He might say things to you that he would keep even from me."

Gale stared at her in blank amazement. "He—he is very cheerful," he replied. "Is there anything serious the matter with him?"

"Consumption," she said, curtly. "A sudden cold is very dangerous."

"I am sorry to hear that," Gale said. "I hope this bad turn won't last long." And then he hurried out into the dusky street.

He went the next day to the Promenade, but he had a premonition that he should not find Monsieur Brenta there, and this premonition proved correct. Again he went to the shop. Instead of plump, smiling Madame Brenta, he was met by a grenadier-like Frenchwoman.

"Is Monsieur Brenta worse?" he asked, in the grenadier-like woman's native tongue.

"Yes; he had a hemorrhage last night—a very

bad one. Here is the doctor now," said the Frenchwoman.

Gale turned as a short, stout man with a gray beard came out of the little parlor. "Is Monsieur Brenta worse?" he asked again.

"A mere question of time," the doctor answered. "He has had too many such attacks for him to rally from this one. It is the last." And the doctor hurried out of the shop and jumped into his coupé.

Obedying a sudden impulse—something which he indeed always obeyed—Gale took his card from his pocket and wrote thereon, "If I can be of any assistance to you, send for me. I am at the Hôtel Chauvain." This he handed to the Frenchwoman, asking her to give it to Madame Brenta. His reflections as he walked towards the hotel were sad ones. He reproached himself for having watched Monsieur Brenta, for having deceived him and coaxed his secret from him. And he had done it out of sheer curiosity, to make a piquant tale wherewith to amuse Russel. But he would never amuse Russel with this story: it would always make him melancholy to think of it. And, meanwhile, he wondered where the English governess was. What would she say when she heard of Rudolph Brenta's fate?

"Deuce take it!" said Gale to himself. "I will go to Genoa to-morrow."

The next morning, while he was sipping his coffee, a little note was given to him. It ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—Monsieur Brenta is very anxious to see you. He has not told me why; but I can easily

imagine. I beg you will regard his wish. It is among the last he will ever express.

“MARY BRENTA.”

“By George!” said Gale. “Why did I ever ask the poor old fellow what time it was?”

He went to the little shop at once, and was met in the door-way by Madame Brenta.

“He is very weak,” she said, without any preamble; “and don’t stay with him long. Humor him. It will not cost you anything.” Her voice was curiously hard, but there were tears in her eyes. “I understand it all,” she continued, “and I will explain; but go in to him now. He is expecting you.”

She led him into a small room off the parlor, back of the shop, and there on the bed lay Monsieur Brenta. Hair and mustache were silvery-white now, and his face was deathly pale. He held out his hand with a smile. “I knew you would come, Mr. Gale,” he said, in a feeble voice. “Will you do something for me? I want you to go to that place on the Promenade, and explain to her why I am not there. You will know her from her portrait. She will be dressed in black. She always wears black. Her name—did I tell you her name?”

Gale shook his head.

“Her name is Elton. And give her this.” He now brought a ring from under his pillow. “It belonged to her mother, and she only lent it to me so that I could have another made of the right size. Don’t say anything to my sister-in-law about it. She is so—so unsympathetic. But she is—very kind—to me.”

His voice fell away into a whisper, and he closed his eyes.

"I am tiring you," Gale said, taking his hand, "so I will bid you good-bye. I will do as you wish."

Monsieur Brenta opened his eyes and smiled. "I am not so very ill," he said, with an effort. "Tell her—I will be on—on the Promenade in a few—days. *Au revoir*."

"*Au revoir*," Gale murmured, as he went softly from the room.

"What did he want?" said Madame Brenta, when he entered the shop. "There are no money-troubles, are there?"

"No money-troubles," he replied; "but Monsieur Brenta asked me not to tell you what he wanted me to do for him, and I—I don't know whether I ought to violate his confidence. I only met him by chance on the Promenade. He was always there on the same bench, and we made each other's acquaintance, and, some way, we grew very confidential. He seems to trust me."

"Don't you think I understand?" said Madame Brenta, laying her hand on the young man's arm, and smiling sadly. "You are not the first he has taken into his confidence—although none of his chance acquaintances ever came to the house before. I think that you are a gentleman."

"I hope I am," Gale stammered.

"I know exactly what he told you," she continued. "He said he was waiting to meet an English governess, but that she had not come to the rendezvous for several days, and he feared she was ill."

He said he had money-difficulties which prevented his marrying. He said he had a lawsuit."

Gale looked at her in wonder. Her face was rather stern, and the ready smile of the trader had vanished from her lips.

"Did he show you the miniature?" she added.

"Yes," said Gale.

"And did it not remind you of some one you had seen before?" she now asked, in such an odd tone that Gale looked at her suddenly.

"Why, it was you!" he exclaimed, a great light breaking in upon him all at once.

"Yes, it was I, Mr. Gale. I was the English governess—not an accomplished governess: I only taught the children simple things, for they were all young. I met Monsieur Brenta first at the house of one of my friends. Afterwards I used to see him there on the Promenade. It was foolish; but I was young. And I have never regretted it. That was more than ten years ago; and as soon as I had saved enough money to buy my outfit we were married—"

"Married!" cried Gale. "Why, he said you were his sister-in-law!"

"I am his wife," she returned, with quiet dignity. "Two years after our marriage he lost some money—he had never had very much—and he became low-spirited. Finally, he fell ill of a fever, and I thought he would die; but he did get well, only he forgot that I was his wife, and that he had a little son, and always after he imagined that I was his sister-in-law, and treated me accordingly. I have carried on the shop, he keeping accounts and attending to the correspondence and doing many things as well as ever.

At three o'clock, however, he thought he must be at the appointed place on the Promenade. He has always been kind to me and the child." Her voice broke, but she controlled herself. "It has been very hard," she added.

Gale brought out of his pocket the ring that Monsieur Brenta had given him, and laid it in madame's hand.

"It was mine," she said, looking at it gravely. "But you must excuse me now; he will need me: he is so weak. Good-bye, Mr. Gale."

"Good-bye, Madame Brenta," he said.

The next day the shutters were up before the shop-window.

BY PARNA'S GRAVE.

THE train paused at every lonely station, sometimes permitting a passenger to alight, but oftener gathering up belated summer tourists—the women with golden-rod or asters in their belts, the men with fish-baskets or game-bags over their shoulders. The one passenger-car was old and small and low-ceiled, the red-plush seats were faded, the little panes of glass grimy, and it was only after repeated efforts that I succeeded in raising the window to let the soft wind of early autumn blow against my face. It was with regret that I viewed the fields and woods, for I was leaving them, and every tree beckoned to me, and whispered, “Stay—stay until the frost has turned our leaves, until November gales have stripped us bare, until we hide beneath the thick white snow, until the spring comes slowly up our way.” I wondered if I would stay if I could; whether, if all the world were before me, I would choose to pitch my tent on some solitary beach or within sound of the sighing pines. Was not my longing born of a comfortable contentment? Was I not in my heart of hearts downright glad to be going back to the town, to my friends, my work, my winter pleasures? A great clump of sumach burned red in a little hollow, and my thoughts jumped to the reading-room of my club, to a deep, crimson arm-chair by the open

fire, and in an instant the rumble of the train sounded like the laden omnibuses toiling over the city street. The conversation of two stolid, middle-aged men behind me called me back from my dreams, and I was listening to their droning account of the evil doings of sundry persons in Saybrook, when the train stopped, and the brakeman called out the place in an inquiring tone that matched his upturned nose and high circling eyebrows. From my window I saw on the platform two youngish, querulous-looking women, who regarded with anxious interest a thick-set, white-haired old man. Evidently he was about to start on a journey, for he carried a satchel which was as new and shining as his tall silk hat. He sprang down from the platform, not lightly, but gayly, and with a half-laughing, half-frowning refusal of the aid eagerly tendered him by both the fussy women. They glanced at each other significantly and pursed up their lips.

"Now, pa, you have got to take some sort of care of yourself," said one of them, in aggrieved tones. "You will git hurt if you go jumping about that way."

The other woman shook her head with a forlorn air that was in itself a prophecy of future mishap to the agile old gentleman; and then she and her companion lifted their skirts very high and stepped down to the ground carefully, as if to show that they knew enough to be heedful how they placed their precious feet. Then they gave the old gentleman much doleful good advice, and he, declaring that he was a sight smarter than they thought, bestowed a hearty kiss upon each, and, wrenching himself free from their

clutches, got on the car just as the train began to glide away. He came slowly down the aisle, looking right and left towards the well-filled seats, until he arrived opposite me, when he halted and glanced at the portmanteau that so far had been a defence against intruders. I made a place for him at once, for my heart warmed towards him — I hardly know why, unless it were because he reminded me vaguely of my own white-haired father, dead this many a year.

“Thank you, young man,” he said. “Got the window open, eh? Just lemme wave my handkerchief out of it to the girls, will you?”

He leaned heavily on my knees and waved his handkerchief merrily to the two women, who shook theirs sadly in return. This ceremony over, my companion squared himself in the seat and looked unnaturally grave. He wore a new suit of black broadcloth, cut as only a country tailor can cut black broadcloth, the low vest displaying a great expanse of white shirt that ended at the neck in a high collar, about which was tied a soft black silk scarf. The ends and loops of the scarf were so carefully pulled out and arranged that I would have wagered anything that one of those elderly girls had presided over this part of the old gentleman's toilet. His hands were brown, but not hard as those are of a man who holds a plough, and his face was lighted by a pair of shrewd, twinkling blue eyes. He brushed a white thread off his coat, he crossed his legs, he looked askant at me, and remarked that it was a fine day. I replied promptly that I had never known' more perfect autumn weather.

“Just the morning to start off,” said the old man.

"My girls kind o' surmised it would rain; but I guess it was only because they wanted to keep me home. They couldn't see why I should start up all of a sudden and go visiting."

"So you are off on a pleasure-trip?" I remarked.

He nodded and smiled: "I ain't going very far; but it's to a place where I ain't been in a long time, though I have lived within twenty miles of it for more than thirty-five years. Queer how you travel here and there and don't think of places right near home."

"Yes," I said. "I was born and raised fifty or sixty miles from Niagara, but I never went to see the Falls."

My companion slapped his knee: "That's just it. I have been living almost next door, as you might say, to my old home, where I grew up, and I ain't been there in ten years. I went over once to the funeral of an uncle of mine, my mother's only brother, and I ain't seen any of the folks, except now and then as they would come on business or something of that sort to our village. Lately, though, I have had a great desire to go back—want to see the orchards that I hooked apples from when I was a boy." He paused and chuckled at the delightful memory of his youthful pranks; but his face grew grave, and when he continued it was in a low, confidential tone: "You see, I have got to go pretty soon, for I had a warning this spring—a stroke—paralysis—apoplexy—I don't know which; but for a while I was bad off. I can't do much nowadays, and my sons-in-law run the store mostly; and so I says to the girls that I would buy a new suit of

clothes. I should have to have 'em anyhow to be buried in, and I might as well get a little wear out of 'em first. So I got the suit; and then I made up my mind to go visiting. The girls didn't like to have me go off; but I ain't got so old as to be bossed around like a child. I knew I could take care of myself, and I know everybody in Baldwin—that's the name of the place I am going to; next station but one. I was raised there. I guess this will be my last visit—though a man may have a shake and live twenty years afterwards. It don't make me much alive, somehow; though I ain't so pious as to want to die and go to heaven right off."

He smiled, and his eyes twinkled, but his words were pathetic to me. Perhaps I encouraged him to talk, for he rambled on, telling me all about his family and business affairs, and winding up with an account of his wife's death, which had occurred the winter before. He was deep in the details of her last illness when the train stopped so suddenly as to startle everybody, and the men with one accord hastened out of the car and rushed forward to find out what had happened. A freight-train had run off the track, wrecking one car completely; but a gang of laborers had already arrived from New Haven, and the conductor told us that the way would be cleared in an hour or so. Leaving my new friend to watch the progress of the work, I sauntered slowly down a shady road that wound through lonely fields. Presently I came on a little school-house, painted white, and through the opened windows and door I saw a few children seated at their desks, while a few others stood up before the spinster

teacher, reciting a lesson. I felt a thrill of pity for the lint-locked urchin who was saying the multiplication-table, stumbling over the nines, just as I had in my boyhood. Opposite was a graveyard, running up steep to the east and enclosed by a low stone wall that was almost hidden beneath tangled vines and sprawling bushes. There were no paths, and the gravestones peered out from a dense growth of tall grasses, purple asters, and vivid golden-rod. One stone marked the grave of a certain Apollos Welthey, who had fallen in the battle of Seven Mountains. I made my way about the graves slowly, but I found no quaint epitaphs, although some of the names struck me as extraordinary—such as Noahdiah and Parthena and Minervia. Far up on the brow of the hill was a simple marble slab, marking the place where Parna Shelby was buried, who had died in 1846, aged eighteen. Set back in the headstone, and protected by a marble flap that hung on a hinge, I discovered a daguerrotype of the dead girl, and I looked long and earnestly on the pictured face. The expression was gentle and winning. Her thick hair was drawn back from a broad intelligent brow, and the shadow of a smile lurked in the corners of her mouth. Her large eyes met mine with a sort of entreaty, making an appeal for sympathy and respect. At her throat an old-fashioned brooch fastened a pretty embroidered collar, and the austere simple dress fitted smoothly over her sloping shoulders and girlish breast. She had died in September: perhaps she had been buried on just such a day as this, when the golden-rod flamed along the fences, and the asters were abloom

everywhere. She must have had friends to mourn her, a mother to weep bitter tears in the darkness of the night. Even the seasons, with their storms of rain and snow, had dealt tenderly with this portrait of her, hidden away in the stone.

“You here?”

I started. Behind me stood the garrulous old man, my companion in the cars, looking down at me seriously, and without a word he seated himself beside me on the sunken stone near Parna's grave. For a while we were silent, and the children in the school-house across the way began to recite something in chorus, their voices rising and falling in a monotonous chant.

“Poor Parna!” said the old man, softly.

“You knew her?”

He nodded, and, taking hold of my arm, pointed to a church-spire that showed itself on a hill to the west. “That's where I'm going,” he said. “It ain't three miles away, and, as we have to stay here till the track is clear for the train, I thought I'd just walk down and see the graveyard. My folks are buried yender, under that pine-tree, and I suppose I'll lay along-side of 'em some day. I told the girls to bring me. I'd rather be here than anywhere else, I guess.”

After a minute's pause he stretched out his hand, raised the marble flap, and looked at the portrait of Parna with a wavering smile.

“It's a good likeness,” he continued. “Her old father had it put in. She was all he had left, and he didn't stay long after she was gone. He used to come here, and sit and look at the picture by the

hour. Many's the time I have seen him sitting here all alone, sort o' talking, as though she could hear. He was childish, and I guess he thought she knew that he had come to keep her company. Perhaps she did." And the old man let the flap fall over the portrait, and turned his blue eyes to me in solemn wonder. "She used to teach school across the way," he went on, "and all the children came to her funeral. Lord! it don't seem but yesterday that we stood here listening to the clumps of earth falling on her coffin. Poor Parna! She was a good girl. Everybody loved her."

His voice broke, but an absent smile lingered on his face. "She was engaged to be married," he said, with a certain hesitation, "and her sweetheart was 'most broken-hearted. He wasn't of much account, but she thought a good deal of him, and he was going to study for the ministry, though his folks were awful set against it, for, you see, he wasn't so young, being — lemme see — oh, he was nigh onto ten years older than her."

"And after she died?" I asked.

He drew down his mouth: "Well, he give up all thoughts of studying for the ministry. You see, he never felt he had a real call for it; but he would have studied to please her. After she was gone he did as his folks wanted him to, and went to a village where an uncle of his kept store. And he kept store — made some money at it, too; and when his uncle died he got the business."

"And did he ever marry?"

"Yes," said the old man, slowly, and with an odd, deprecatory smile. "Yes, he married a woman no

more like Parna than Martha in the Bible was like Mary. Not but what she was a good woman," he added, hastily, "and an uncommon smart woman—a regular go-ahead, all energy, always driving, always saving, up before daylight. Still, I don't believe Parna's sweetheart ever forgot her, though he did marry and have children. Those were my daughters that brought me to the depot: you may have seen 'em. They are both married now, and they are both like their mother. They are their mother right over again, so to speak—all push and energy—and they just keep their husbands going all the time. Now, Parna"—here his voice grew soft, and he looked at the picture again—"she wasn't one of that sort. She was gentle, and she had a low voice. She had a good deal of energy, too, but there was a womany way about her: I don't know how to express it exactly. Why, sometimes over there at the school the boys were regular devils, but she could rule 'em. You see, she got 'em to love her; that was all. They came to her funeral, and the biggest boys carried her coffin. I remember one chap, Abe Mosely he was, and he was a limb of the law, and nobody could control him, he was always fighting and getting into mischief; but when they buried Parna he stood there, just where that tallest clump of golden-rod is, and he kept his arm over his face all the while the minister was talking. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes. Poor Parna!"

He said no more, but with a trembling hand he picked a bunch of the asters at his feet, and though they grew wild all about, these he laid on the grave. With a joyous shout the children burst out of school,

and then the old man and I rose and walked away together in silence. He did not dream that he had revealed to me the romance that had made his life at once sweet and sad ; he did not know how much he had told as we sat by Parna's grave.

“MEES.”

RED-ARMED Annette gave a final glance at the table, and as the clock was striking eight summoned Frau Pastorin Raben's boarders to supper. Promptly came the two Von Ente girls, high-born and high-nosed damsels, forced to make themselves teachers. It had been a sad blow to their pride. The elder was somewhat consoled by a huge carbuncle brooch given to her by Kaiser Wilhelm himself. The younger was named for a very great lady; and when a letter came from the very great lady the recipient lifted her head and remembered that, whatever happened, she was a Von Ente.

Following them close, there entered the dining-room a woman who painted pictures and sold them. Hedwig Vogel was about fifty, tall, angular, hard-featured. She was reported to be very rich and very mean. Moreover, she was an undoubted democrat; for when Elsa von Ente's lady patron came to the house, everybody kissed the august dame's hand except Hedwig Vogel and “the Mees.” Of course the Mees, poor thing! knew no better; but Fräulein Vogel!—a woman guilty of such a misdemeanor was capable of putting dynamite in Bismarck's nightcap. She responded curtly to the greeting given to her by the Von Entes, and then asked where the Frau Pastorin might be.

"Here," answered a soft voice, and the plump, smiling, suave mistress of the house entered and seated herself at the table. As she bowed her head to invoke a blessing on the smoked herring, the raw ham, the salad, the three kinds of bread, a tardy boarder opened the dining-room door. She stood on the threshold for a minute, then moved swiftly to her place.

"Good-evening, Mees," said the Frau Pastorin, and "Good-evening, Mees," echoed the Von Entes. Fräulein Vogel contented herself with a nod, and attacked bread and ham in hungry silence.

"Your walk has given you a fine color," the Frau Pastorin continued, blandly. Then, turning to the artist, "You should paint the Mees, Fräulein. 'A Study of America.' That would sound well, would it not?"

The Study of America smiled a little disdainfully, and refused the raw ham and the herring offered to her by Elsa von Ente. She had refused raw ham and smoked herring at least a hundred times, but yet the Frau Pastorin protested.

"I am sad there is nothing for you," she murmured, in English—a language she fondly fancied she spoke.

"Oh, there is bread galore," said the Mees.

This set the hostess to thinking. Bread she understood; but what was bread galore?

"I should like to learn some American dishes," she said. "Buckwhit cakes—so, is it right?—I have read of them. How you would relish them to-night, would you not?"

"No," said Mees, ungraciously.

"Not?" said the Von Entes, who talked together habitually. "But what then?"

"Beef—mutton—chickens," said Mees.

"We have them here," murmured the Frau Pastorin, sweetly.

"Do you?" said Mees, quite as sweetly. And Hedwig Vogel burst out laughing. The Frau Pastorin bit her lip, the Von Ente girls looked blank, and Annette scuttled away, smelling danger from afar, for she knew full well that she often received a vicarious reproof.

Supper over, the table was cleared and a big Bible laid before the Frau Pastorin, who, as a clergyman's widow, felt that it was her duty to set a good example to the sojourners beneath her roof. Hedwig Vogel, however, did not stay to the reading; she went up to her bare, lonely rooms. They were totally lacking in character, for neither the woman nor the artist was betrayed in their appointments. Everything was scrupulously clean and painfully neat about them. German-fashion, the square table was pushed close to the sofa, and held a lamp and four never-opened books. Here Fräulein Vogel seated herself, turned up the lamp-wick, and then crossed her long, lean, sinewy hands in her lap. The tall white porcelain stove made the room so warm that she presently rose and set a window open a little way. She was indeed a dangerous, unconventional creature, a Prussian who cared neither for great ladies nor draughts. She stood there, feeling the damp air of early spring blow in her face. From the beer-hall near by came the sound of music; over the pavement rattled a cart drawn by two

weary dogs and followed by a yet wearier peasant-woman; with a brave clink-clank of spurs and sword strode by a brave lieutenant. Above all these sounds Fräulein Vogel's quick ear caught a light footfall on the bare stairs without. She crossed the parlor and flung open the door.

"Mees."

"Yes, most gracious lady."

"Ridiculous—'gracious lady!' Come in."

Mees obeyed, and took the place of honor on the sofa beside the painter.

"I have a favor to ask," she said, with a deprecatory smile. "Don't call me Mees, please. It does not mean anything."

"Shall I say Mees Varing?" asked the painter, with a struggle to pronounce the name properly.

"Unless you like Kitty better," said Mees.

"Kitty—Kitty." Fräulein Vogel repeated it gravely. "Kitty." She smiled. "Kitty Varing, of New York. Now I have it all."

"No," said Kitty, "not quite. Of Withlacootchie, New York."

They both laughed, the Indian name was so unmanageable. Kitty finally wrote it down, and the painter pronounced it over and over again. At last she straightened up, and said, sternly, "But where is the picture, Mees—Kitty?"

"Ah, you don't want to see it," Kitty exclaimed; "and I don't want to show it to you. I tell you I have no talent. I suppose, though, patience must tell in the end," she added, half to herself.

"Yes, it will tell," said the painter, grimly. "It will tell—something. Go get your picture now."

Kitty crossed the corridor to her own little room. There was the picture—a sketch in oils of the best-known model in Düsseldorf, this time rigged out as a Roman peasant. The girl looked at the picture with a frown; she seized it as though she would dash it on the floor in scorn, but, checking the impulse, she carried it to Fräulein Vogel.

The successful painter looked at the sketch in silence for a full minute, holding it off at arm's-length. Finally, she laid it down on the table, murmuring, "And after three years' hard work!"

"Only a year's real work," Kitty broke in, eagerly. "I have only been here a year, you know; and those two years at home I ought not to count, for I did not work then as I do now."

"Why not?" asked Fräulein Vogel, sharply. — And Kitty changed color.

"Ah, one must not ask questions," Fräulein Vogel remarked; "but one can have plenty of suspicions. I dare say you were in love, and, as love failed, you have taken to art. So it goes with women. Everything but marriage is a *pis-aller*."

Kitty half rose; the stray arrow had sped home, and it rankled in a new wound.

"I am a woman myself," added Fräulein Vogel, with a droll smile that melted the girl's anger in an instant.

Kitty dropped down on the sofa. "Well," she said, gayly, "I grant that I was in love once on a time; but that is all past. Now I want to be a painter. Listen: I have not much money, I have no friends—that is, friends such as we read about—and I must learn to make some money. When

I am thirty I shall begin to make money; otherwise—"

"You are spending your capital," said Fräulein Vogel.

"If I spent only my income I should either wear shoes and no clothes, or clothes and no shoes," answered Kitty, laughing, with a little air of recklessness that sat well on her. "Besides," she added, sagely, "it is well to burn one's ships. Sink or swim."

"But you are quite sure of swimming?" said Fräulein Vogel, taking up the picture again and looking at it closely.

"It is very bad," Kitty said.

"Abominable," said the painter. She drew a long breath and shook her head. "Abominable," she repeated, almost as though such an abominable piece of work demanded respect. "*Ach!* You leave old Zweifarbe's studio," she exclaimed. "Send your easel over to me. You want to make some money? Good. There are many artists here in Düsseldorf who say I cannot paint; there is not one who will say I have not made money. Perhaps I can teach you." And Fräulein Vogel burst out laughing, while Kitty stared at her in blank surprise.

"But you have never taken pupils," she stammered.

"I have never died; but I suppose I shall," was the response.

And so old Zweifarbe lost a pupil—for Kitty's easel was straightway borne on the back of a sturdy *diensmann* to Fräulein Vogel's studio. What a chatter, what a commotion it caused in the nest of

painters! They chirped and gossiped and pecked each other like a flock of sparrows. The Frau Pastorin expressed the popular sentiment when she discussed Hedwig Vogel's eccentricities.

"How much a lesson?" she said, half closing one shrewd gray eye. "How much a lesson? Ah, she would not take pupils — no, no, not while she was Hedwig Vogel; and *der liebe Gott* knows she will never be Hedwig anything else. But she will make an exception for our dear Mees Varing; oh yes, an exception! Wait till Mees Varing's rich American friends come along and buy some of the great Vogel's pictures. You will see."

"But has the Mees any rich friends?" asked her crony the Frau Doctorin.

And then the parson's widow laughed in a worldly way.

"So pretty a girl," she said, "so fine a complexion, such little feet! And those winning ways!"

From which it will be seen that the Frau Pastorin could admire and appreciate a woman who was young and beautiful. So could the painters; but that is easier to believe. And so could the tight-booted lieutenants; but that is perfectly understood. When Kitty Waring crossed the Hof Garten, even that old woman who years and years ago sold little Heinrich Heine plums would point out the girl to her contemporary the venerable undergardener.

"*Hübsch*," the old woman would growl.

"*Aber leichtsinnig — leichtsinnig*," the old man would add—for he was a misogynist.

But Kitty was not quite *leichtsinnig*, although

she did stroll through the garden sometimes with Fritz Goebel, sometimes with Otho Weiss, sometimes with her fellow-countryman, Joe Buckley. They were all young, all painters, all poor. Who cared what they did? What if they sat on a bench under a linden-tree, and played cat's-cradle like children? What if they made little excursions to Zons or to Xanten? What if there was a supper in Joe Buckley's studio, and Kitty Waring and Anna van der Meer—a sedate creature from Rotterdam was she—were taught how to make a true, good *bowle*? Who cared? In fact, all Düsseldorf cared.

One day the Fran Pastorin called Kitty into her parlor. "Dear child," she began, "if your good mother—"

"She has been dead fifteen years," said Kitty.

"If your father—" continued the Frau Pastorin.

"He? Oh, I can't remember him at all," said Kitty.

"Have you no family?" was the question that the Fran Pastorin put squarely.

"An uncle or two somewhere in Iowa," Kitty answered. "An aunt brought me up, and then died, poor thing!" A smile flitted across Kitty's face, and tears sprang to her eyes; but her questioner saw only the smile. The world is full of such purblind folk.

"Where were you last night so late?" she said, acridly.

Kitty turned on the plump little woman and looked down at her.

"When Miss Smythe told me that I should find a pleasant home here, she made a sad mistake," was

the irrelevant answer that Mees gave. It puzzled the Frau Pastorin for full a week. Then Hedwig Vogel and Mees paid their honest debts, and took up quarters with Frau Tisch, in the Rosenstrasse.

"It is much pleasanter here," cried Kitty, as she moved about the parlor, transforming the commonplace aspect of the room. "And it is cheap, too. I thought Frau Tisch would ask more than Frau Raben."

"It is less because we club together," said Fräulein Vogel.

Kitty might have suspected something if her new friend had not had the name of being so close-fisted. Who would dream that Hedwig Vogel could be free-handed?—she who would beat a *gemüse frau* out of two cents; she who refused to subscribe to the fund for painters' widows, declaring that it was as likely she would leave a widow as be left one. She was not susceptible, she cared naught for sweet smiles and gentle ways. That she, a gaunt, grim, brusque woman of fifty, could suddenly feel all the stifled mother-love within her spring up—that was preposterous, the vain imagining of a romancer.

They worked together, these two, in Hedwig Vogel's studio, and Kitty strove to make up for her lack of talent by her abundance of patience.

"Why did you decide to be a painter?" Fräulein Vogel asked her one day.

"Because I had a start in that line," Kitty answered. "If I had had a start in music I should have tried to play or sing. I wonder if I could sing? They say everybody has a voice. People are just like fields: plough 'em up, plant cabbages, plant

potatoes, you can raise some sort of a crop. How do you happen to be a painter?"

Hedwig Vogel paused, palette in one hand, brush in the other. "Because I would rather paint than eat," she answered.

"That is genius," said Kitty, solemnly. "I would rather eat. That is lack of genius. But because I want to eat I paint. That is—what would you call that?"

"You have a daub of ochre on your nose," said Fräulein Vogel.

"Any way," Kitty remarked, after a while, "if worse came to worst I could teach. There is German. Now, I really speak German well, don't I? I could teach that."

"Oh, you have the gift o' gab!" said the painter. "But you will be married, sure."

A long silence followed. "I am twenty-four," said Kitty.

"There is no safety for you this side of the grave," said Fräulein Vogel.

"I may be married, but I doubt it," Kitty continued. "I—" And then she dropped her brushes, flung herself prone on the floor, and burst into passionate tears. Hedwig Vogel did not try to comfort her, but she knelt beside her, and put her strong right arm about the girl's quivering shoulders. At last Kitty sat up, and brushed back her tangled hair.

"Every day I think of him," she said. "Every day I hope, I pray he will come. I watch for the postman—I have watched for him so long. He never brings me a letter, but my heart stops beating when he draws near the house. When he rings the

bell, when the servant comes up the stairs, I shut my eyes. I can almost believe I have the letter in my hand. I almost see the words. But there is never a letter—there never can be. Oh, I—” She rose and walked to and fro. “I am to blame,” she added, laying her hand on Fräulein Vogel’s shoulder. “I wronged him by my suspicion, my petty jealousy; then I ran away from him, and expected him to roam over Europe trying to find me. I hid myself from him, and I am eating my heart out because he does not come.”

“Suppose,” said Fräulein Vogel, “that he is seeking for you now?”

Kitty’s wet eyes shone for a moment. “I am not worth that,” she said.

“But if he loves you?”

“Oh, he loves me, I know!” she exclaimed. “And I doubted him. I thought all manner of base thoughts, and I told him of them to his face—to him, the noblest, dearest—and he never reproached me. Do you wonder I am ashamed to write to him? Do you wonder I dare not ask his pardon?”

“If he loves you he would forgive anything,” said Fräulein Vogel.

The room had grown dark, and they mechanically washed their brushes, cleaned their palettes, and made ready to go home. As they crossed the Hof Garten, two or three young painters joined them, and the talk ran on gayly. Fräulein Vogel had heard Kitty’s laugh ring out many a time before, but never until now did she hear the sad note that dimmed the sweetness of it. The young men turned away at last.

"To-morrow, then, at eight," sang out Otho Weiss.

"Until to-morrow," cried the others.

"Until to-morrow," Kitty echoed. "Always to-morrow," she added, softly, to herself.

"I do not understand," said Fräulein Vogel, going back to the talk in the studio.

"I was jealous," Kitty answered, simply. "He was above me in station—"

"I thought there was no rank in America," said Fräulein Vogel.

"Then you cannot understand how a big tradesman scorns a little one," Kitty rejoined. "My aunt kept a shop, but she would never let me help her sell pins and needles and tape. No, I must go to school with girls whose fathers sold pins by the ton instead of by the paper—or by the pound as you do here. His father sold them by the ton—a mere matter of big and little. The family was reconciled to me after a while. You see, the family had to be reconciled, for Frank did not care what they said to him."

"He loved you," said Fräulein Vogel.

"Yes, but they wanted him to love somebody else. Perhaps he would have done so if I had not come in his way. Perhaps he would have married the right girl—a limp, languid creature, with money enough to build a cathedral like the one at Cologne. She made the trouble. They said he was tired of me, that he repented his impetuosity; and I heard it all, and I grew jealous—jealous of nothing. I reproached him, told him that he wanted her and her money. Then came the crash. My aunt died. I

had a chance to come to Europe with some people, and I did not even bid him good-bye. Now I expect him to write to me—to find me.”

She laughed a little as she said this.

“Some day,” said Fräulein Vogel. “If he loves you,” she added.

“I doubted him,” Kitty said, “and I deserve all this. Ah, if you knew him, if you saw him, you would know what a fool I was!”

They had reached the house by this time, and as Kitty opened the door, she added, “I must write soon. I must hear something about him. What may not have happened in a year? Perhaps he is dead.”

She did not mention her lover again to Fräulein Vogel, except once when she showed her his portrait; and the sharp-eyed painter looked at the frank, manly face a long time.

“Write to him, you foolish woman,” she said.

“Not yet. I will wait a little longer,” Kitty rejoined.

The summer wore away. In August they went for a fortnight to a little place near Remagen—Bad Neunahr it is called—and here Kitty’s eyes were opened, and she suddenly awoke to the fact that her new friend was no ordinary friend.

“You need not worry about money,” said Fräulein Vogel. “If you don’t learn how to make it, you know how to spend it. I could never learn that myself.”

But in the autumn Kitty only worked the harder, believing with all her heart that patience would make a respectable picture-selling painter out of a

Chinese mandarin. When the gray dawn stole in at the window she sprang out of bed, dressed, and was off to the studio for an hour before breakfast. She begrudged the time spent for dinner, she bemoaned a dark day, and she laid her brushes down reluctantly in the twilight. In the evening she wanted to go to the theatre, to a concert, to a supper. Such as she find plenty of companions, and from time to time Düsseldorf raised its hands over her doings. Fräulein Vogel watched and waited in a sort of patient agony, but at last, not without deep reflection, she wrote a letter to Kitty's sweetheart. She read his name on the back of a photograph, she knew well how to spell the name of the town, she knew the town was near New York, she knew New York was in North America, and she had to buy an extra big envelope to hold the whole address. But the letter was a terrible thing, and a happy thought came to her. She made a little picture of Kitty—a perfect little picture—and beneath it she wrote name and address. That was better than a thousand letters. Carefully she did it up, placing tissue-paper above and beneath the card-board, and laying it tenderly in a white box. Surely it could not go astray, unless all the post-office men were blind; but, to make sure, she would register it, if that were possible. All must be done without Kitty's knowledge, and the touch of mystery made the romance the sweeter. One fine day she sallied forth to send the little portrait on its way. She entered the Hof Garten, sauntered down the Linden Allée, thinking all the while how delightfully the comedy would end. Her own part, as good fairy of the play,

pleased her too, and she smiled to herself as she strayed off from the Allée, and seating herself on a bench that was well screened from prying eyes, she gave herself up to reverie. Of course the lover would come, of course he would carry Kitty off; but Fräulein Vogel did not mean to be left far behind. She would look after Kitty, for the foolish, impetuous creature would need at least two people to keep her out of mischief.

“Frank.”

Some one uttered the name, and Fräulein Vogel peered through the leaves. Sitting near was a pale, sweet-faced woman, drawing figures in the gravel with the tip of her parasol.

“Frank,” she repeated, “shall we go home?”

“Do you mean Withlacootchie or the hotel?” was the answer.

The man had his back to Fräulein Vogel, but now he turned, and she recognized him. The portrait had lied a little, as portraits will lie, and yet he was a handsome man enough, after all.

“Home or the hotel, dear?” His voice was very gentle, and his smile tender. “Are you tired of wandering?” he added.

“Oh no,” she said, “but whither shall we wander?”

“Up-stairs, down-stairs, in my lady’s chamber,” he rejoined. “Last summer the Tyrol; last winter Italy; this summer Switzerland; now — where? We are making a long honeymoon of it.”

“And are you tired?” she asked.

He gave a rapid glance up and down the Allée, then stooped and kissed her.

Fräulein Vogel had not understood all the words, the caress she saw. She rose and went slowly homeward. In the tiny Düssel the swans were floating majestically, and standing there on the bank, she tore the box and the picture into scraps and flung them into the water. The swans hastened after the bits of white paper; they fought and screamed over them, and the victor proudly bore away a fragment from his envious mates, only to discover that it was worthless.

THE END.

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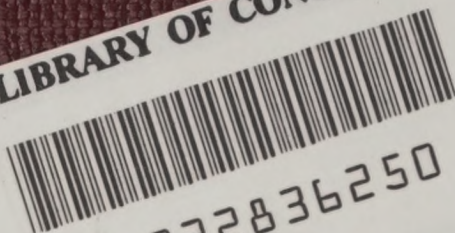
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